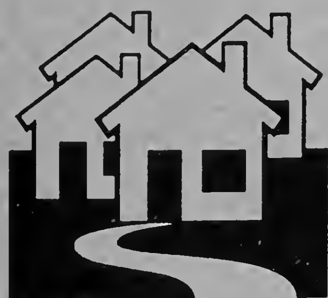
THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Montana Department of Commerce

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"The future now depends on people all over the country working together to make things better in their particular place. It depends on people in different kinds of places - large and small towns, urban and rural neighborhoods - asking themselves what can we do to make this community a more hopeful place to be young, a more rewarding place to work, and a more friendly place to grow old."

Alice Rivlin, former Director of the Congressional Budget Office and Vice-Chair of the Federal Reserve Board

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EXHIBITS

The forms included in the exhibits listed above can be ordered from the Department of Commerce in 3.5 inch "floppy" computer disk format to simplify the process of designing local forms for income surveys or for completing CDBG application forms. The format used by MDOC is Microsoft Word for Windows.

1. THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENT FOR THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) PROGRAM

The basic framework of Montana's CDBG Program was established in 1982 by a 14-member Task Force composed of local government officials which was appointed by the Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC) to design the State's CDBG program. The Task Force recommended including a requirement for a community needs assessment as part of the CDBG application process. Their intent was to encourage Montana communities to move away from a "crisis management" approach to community problem-solving and instead adopt a view of community development as a methodical, long-term process of incremental and inter-related actions to improve the community. The Task Force also was the source of the requirement for two public hearings as part of the CDBG application process: one to be held as part of the needs assessment process and a second prior to submitting the CDBG application. The Task Force members felt strongly that broad public involvement was critical for the process of setting community development goals and priorities and for successful CDBG project implementation.

In 1984, Congress amended the Federal Housing and Community Development Act to require that each CDBG recipient "identify its community development and housing needs, including the needs of low and moderate-income persons, and the activities to be undertaken to meet such needs." According to the legislative history for the amendment, Congress established this requirement to promote better-coordinated strategies for addressing local needs, particularly as they affect low and moderate income persons.

To meet the needs assessment requirement, the Montana CDBG Program requires that each local government applicant for a Housing and Community Revitalization or Public Facilities CDBG project must include a narrative that describes:

1. **The applicant's overall community development needs, including the needs of low and moderate income persons;**

2. **The process used by the applicant to identify overall community development needs and the activities it plans to meet the identified needs; and**

3. **The rationale for selecting the proposed CDBG project.**

The narrative should be incorporated as part of the applicant's response to the "Community Planning and Needs Assessment" ranking criterion used for both the Housing and Community Revitalization and Public Facilities grant categories.

It is the intent of Montana's CDBG Program that governments take full advantage of their local planning programs and not unnecessarily duplicate their local planning efforts solely for the purposes of submitting a CDBG application. In many cases, a local government may have already thoroughly reviewed community needs through preparation of a community comprehensive plan, master plan, or growth policy. Where an applicant has an adopted

☞ **In essence, communities should think about what makes their glass "half full" instead of "half empty." While the CDBG requirements speak in terms of "needs," this can also be an excellent opportunity to ask "what's good about our community and how can we make it better?" Address the negatives, yes; but also identify the positive aspects of your community and develop a strategy for building upon them to make the community an even better place to live.**

CDBG Planning Grants - A Tool to Help Communities Fund Needs Assessments

The up-front costs of preparing local needs assessments sometimes can present an obstacle for communities, particularly for small towns with limited resources. The Montana CDBG program is able to play a unique role in assisting Montana communities because of its ability to offer planning grants to local governments. The grants can be used for a variety of planning activities including preparation of community needs assessments or other planning efforts. Please contact the Department of Commerce for a copy of the current Planning Grant Guidelines, or refer to the CDBG website at:

http://commerce.state.mt.us/LocGov/Com/Cdbg/index.html

2. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CDBG PROGRAM

The Federal Housing and Community Development Act "encourages citizen participation, with particular emphasis on participation by persons of low and moderate income" both in the preparation of CDBG applications and throughout the implementation of local CDBG projects. Specifically, the Act requires public hearings "to obtain the view of citizens on community development and housing needs" and on "proposed activities." Congress has mandated that the hearings "be held after adequate notice, at times and locations convenient to potential or actual beneficiaries, and with accommodation for the handicapped."

Unless reapplying for the same project submitted unsuccessfully in the previous year, the applicant must hold a minimum of two public hearings, one before preparing the application and one prior to passage of a resolution by the governing body authorizing the submission of the application. A record of the required hearings must be submitted with the application for CDBG funds, along with copies of the public notices for the hearings or affidavits of publication for the notices. A verbatim record is not necessary; the names of persons who attended and a summary of comments by local officials and citizens are sufficient. Applicants should hold the first public hearing not more than eighteen months prior to the date of application. The second public hearing should be held not more than three months prior to the date of application.

Applicants reapplying for the same project submitted unsuccessfully in the previous year must still hold at least one public hearing prior to the passage of the resolution by the governing body authorizing the submission of the application. The applicant should hold the hearing not more than three months prior to the date of application.

Public notice must be provided before public hearings are held. Notice of each public hearing should be published at least once in a newspaper of general circulation in the community at least seven days prior to the hearing. Where possible, notice should also be directed to persons of low and moderate income or those persons who will benefit from or be affected by CDBG activities and/or groups representing low and moderate income persons. Hearings must be held at times and locations convenient to the general public and with reasonable accommodations for handicapped persons. For hearings where a significant number of non-English speaking residents can be reasonably expected to participate, federal law requires that arrangements be made to have an interpreter present.

In all cases, the local government must conduct the required public hearings, even if the local government is considering applying on behalf of a subrecipient, such as a local housing authority, human resource development council, or a county water and sewer district. Having the local government conduct the hearings, rather than delegating the task to a potential recipient of the CDBG funds, provides the most objective forum for considering alternative community needs (and potentially competing proposals for CDBG projects) and

encourages a frank discussion regarding any proposed community development projects.

SUGGESTION FOR APPLICANTS: Local officials and MDOC staff are well aware that formal public hearings are sometimes a very ineffective means of getting people involved or encouraging meaningful dialogue or discussion. The required CDBG "hearings" do not have to be formally structured or even be conducted in a hearing format to meet the CDBG public hearing requirement. The CDBG Program encourages a setting that promotes open discussion and an exchange of ideas regarding community development needs, priorities, and possible solutions. This can include an open town meeting or facilitated small group discussion with a final summation of identified community needs and solutions. Local officials may also want to use additional public involvement techniques such as open houses or presentations to local organizations to make more citizens aware of community needs and to solicit their ideas.

The First Public Hearing

The first public hearing is intended to give citizens an opportunity **to identify and discuss their community's overall needs and priorities**, including the needs of low and moderate income persons, and to propose possible community improvement projects before the local government decides what project or projects it will seek assistance for. The purpose of the first hearing is to provide an objective and neutral forum for considering overall community needs and potentially competing or alternative proposals for CDBG projects within the local government's jurisdiction.

To minimize duplication, local governments may use public hearings related to their comprehensive planning program or other funding applications to meet the CDBG requirement for a public hearing prior to preparation of their CDBG application, as long as overall community needs and possible solutions are addressed. **An increasing number of Montana counties and cities are cooperating to publicize and hold joint, annual hearings to consider overall community needs for both the city and county** (the annual needs hearing can be held in late winter for example, before the annual budgeting process is initiated.) This approach can also make participation more convenient for the public or interested organizations or groups.

The Second Public Hearing

The purpose of the second public hearing is to give citizens and potential beneficiaries of the proposed CDBG project (especially low and moderate income persons) adequate opportunity **to consider the potential impacts and benefits of the community's proposed project** and to comment on it, before the community submits the application. At this hearing, specific CDBG program requirements and related project issues should be reviewed. For example, if taxes or user changes will need to be increased as part of financing a CDBG project, it is especially important that residents understand the necessity of raising user costs.

To facilitate the participation of citizens who may be most affected by a proposed project, local officials may wish to hold the hearing in a location near the proposed project site, such

as in an unincorporated community or a neighborhood in a larger city. Again, to minimize duplication, local governments may conduct a single public hearing to address the public hearing requirement for other funding programs while meeting the CDBG public hearing requirement.

The citizen participation process should be viewed as more than simply compliance with a grant application requirement. The public involvement process can be a key factor in developing community understanding and support for a proposed CDBG project and ultimately lead to a more successful project. By involving the public up-front in the development of grant proposals, local governments can build the foundation for long-term community support.

Examples of Local Needs Assessment Processes

Alternative approaches for community "needs assessment" and citizen participation processes are explored in more detail in the EXHIBITS. Most Montana communities have used a combination of these techniques for their community planning and needs assessment process. Four examples are discussed below, taken from the unincorporated community of Corvallis in Ravalli County, the Town of Darby, Lewis and Clark County, and the City of Roundup.

Corvallis

Corvallis citizens formed the Corvallis Civic Club in 1993 and successfully applied fora U.S. Forest Service grant in 1994 to prepare a Community Action Plan. A broad cross section of the community was involved in a Community Action Team (CAT) to guide the planning process. The CAT distributed a community survey which identified improvements to the wastewater system, an emergency quick response unit, and tennis courts as immediate community needs.

The CAT formed five working groups: Business & Employment, Recreation, Infrastructure, Pride in Community, and School. By March, 1995, the community/school tennis courts and the Corvallis quick response unit were well underway. Early in 1999, the Corvallis County Sewer District mailed another needs assessment survey questionnaire to district customers in their utility bill and used the survey results to update the Action Plan. The revised Plan includes a schedule of specific projects to be completed by year, identifies the individuals responsible for coordinating the project, describes actions necessary to accomplish the project, the estimated cost and potential funding sources, and projects the date for completion. Ravalli County applied successfully on behalf of the Corvallis County Sewer District for CDBG funding in the fall of 1999 to make improvements to the community's wastewater treatment system.

Darby

A group of over 100 citizens formed the Darby Civic Group in the spring of 1992 to improve the quality of life for Darby area residents and to identify positive ways for the Town to prosper. Darby successfully applied for a U.S. Forest Service grant in 1992 to prepare a Community Action Plan (CAP). With the support of the Town Council, the Civic Group formed a subcommittee, the Community Action Team (CAT), to develop and implement the CAP. The CAT explored the state of the community and identified both problems and opportunities. Input gathered from 200 area residents through a telephone survey, and approximately 70 town meeting participants was incorporated into the final CAP that was adopted in September, 1993.

The CAP, which includes goals and strategies to improve Darby was adopted by the Town Council. In 1998, the Darby Lumber Mill shut down, leaving nearly 100 people out of work. A new 20-member CAT was formed to update the five-year-old plan and address different areas of need. The CAT conducted another community survey to update the 1994 CAP. Additionally, fifty people turned out for a town meeting to discuss the Plan's priorities for the town. The purpose of the plan "is to boost the town in the eyes of potential donors and grant givers with a structured, cohesive plan that the majority of residents agree on." A prioritized list of projects fell into one of the following five categories: Education and Youth Services; Business, Industry and Tourism; Community and Health Services; Cultural, Quality of Life and Environment; and Infrastructure. Some of the Town's priorities included creating a community investment foundation, improved transportation services for seniors, town landscaping, and developing a Darby Webpage. Replacing the Darby Fire Station emerged as the top priority in the Infrastructure category. In 1999, in its second attempt, Darby successfully applied for CDBG funding for a new fire hall.

Lewis & Clark County

Lewis and Clark County appointed a citizen advisory group (CAG) to prepare a new comprehensive plan (growth policy) to replace their ten-year-old plan and bring it into compliance with Senate Bill 97 passed in 1999. The advisory group members were selected to represent a cross-section of interests such as a local pro-planning advocacy group, a local sportsmen's association, realtors, homebuilders, chamber of commerce, city-county planning board, fire districts, property owners, as well as the unincorporated communities in the county. Each CAG member used a standard series of questions to interview several other knowledgeable persons (the "key informant" approach described in the EXHIBITS) to gather additional perspectives on issues of concern to citizens. The CAG also held an annual series of area meetings around the county over a two-year period to invite additional public comment as the plan was developed. At these meetings, CAG members were stationed at tables organized by issues and recorded citizen comments and

concerns regarding the topic. At the end of the meeting, general public discussion and comments were invited. The public comments were used to prepare a draft plan that was presented to the public through six hearings held across the county before it was adopted by the county commissioners.

Roundup

In anticipation of possible coal mining activity, the community of Roundup began a public process in 1992 to discuss community needs. Participants included the City of Roundup, the school system, the county conservation district, and several county officials who met several times to discuss local infrastructure deficiencies. In 1994, a series of meetings were conducted with local agencies, financial institutions, realtors, etc. to assess community housing needs and options for dealing with them. Also, beginning in 1994, monthly noon luncheons were scheduled for the purpose of presenting information about three community topics or issues per month. Presentations were made by local organizations or officials and were well publicized by the local newspaper. These noon meetings, catered by a local church, became known as Topic Around Town (TAT), and had an average attendance of 30 or more citizens. The meetings were conducted consecutively for twelve months.

The TAT process evolved into a very effective community information tool and included local officials, senior citizens, representatives of community organizations, and other interested citizens. In addition, the Central Montana Resource Conservation and Development (RCAD) staff, in coordination with other organizations, conducted a needs assessment for the Roundup area in preparation of a Montana Community Foundation grant. The City also began a municipal facility study with the help of a Montana Coal Board grant. In the fall of 1994, another series of community meetings was held to discuss the results of the city facility study and similar facility studies prepared by the school district and the local hospital. During 1995, the RCAD hosted public meetings on community needs in conjunction with its Overall Economic Development Plan preparation. In 1996, with the support of a grant from the Montana Community Foundation, Roundup conducted a three session Financial Forum to discuss the needs that had been identified for the city and county, the school district, and the community hospital. The Forums were facilitated by a local rancher. The City also contracted with an engineering firm to prepare a capital improvements plan.

Committees were formed to focus on topics including Business, Education, Art & Culture, Human Services, Government, Youth, and Agriculture & Land. Citizens from all economic sectors, age groups, and interests participated in the process, including local government officials, seniors and youth, business people, and educators. The total effort represented several thousands of hours of citizen involvement in identifying overall community needs. In 1996, Roundup applied successfully to the State CDBG Program and the Treasure State Endowment Program for grants to improve the city's wastewater treatment system.

Conclusion

The approach each community uses for involving the public in its need assessment process or planning program can be tailored to the local situation and is only limited by the creativity of the participants. The techniques described in the following Exhibits offer a "smorgasbord" of options that communities can adapt to fit their community.

EXHIBIT A

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

Note: The following is excerpted and adapted from "Coping with Growth: Community Needs Assessment Techniques" by Lorna Butler and Robert Howell, Washington State University, published by Western Rural Development Center, Oregon State University, 1980.

Responsiveness to citizen preferences, concerns, and needs is a basic fundamental of American democracy. This introduction to community needs assessment provides background information on the purposes for conducting a community needs assessment; guidelines for determining which techniques are most appropriate; and a brief description of different needs assessment techniques, including the advantages of each method.

A. PURPOSE

There are several reasons why citizen groups, public officials, and local government staff should secure accurate information about the needs of a community. All communities are in a continual state of change -- through births and deaths of citizens, through people moving out and new people moving in, and through the natural growth and development of the community over time. As a consequence, what once may have been an appropriate policy or program can eventually become inappropriate. The character or attitude of a community can shift as a result of the interplay of social, cultural, and economic changes.

The needs of different groups of people in a community are difficult to identify -- and frequently interrelated. In many instances, people do not express their attitudes and feelings openly; sometimes community needs and opinions are not revealed until a crisis occurs. This makes priority setting and long range planning essential; however, planning and action cannot be carried out effectively without accurate and up-to-date information about citizen needs and desires.

A community needs assessment process is an excellent means of involving the public in problem solving and developing local goals. There is a tendency for people to resist change, frequently because they have inadequate information, or because they have not been involved in making decisions. A needs assessment can be viewed as a process of citizen involvement to allow people not only to learn more about the current situation, but most importantly, to feel that they have had a voice in the outcome.

A needs assessment process can help local leaders:

- Identify needs for new or expanded public facilities or services;

- Assess public opinion about community goals and priorities;
- Systematically evaluate existing programs and services and planning for improvements;
- Provide justifications or explanations for budget and grant requests;
- Increase citizen understanding of community problems and their effects on the community;
- Build an increased citizen support for local government decisions, and develop a greater "sense of ownership" through public involvement;
- Increase citizen awareness of community planning.

B. SELECTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

The quality of information about a community is only as good as the techniques used to gather the information. A single technique may be too narrow in the information it provides; using too many methods may be costly in terms of time and dollars. Different information-gathering techniques are appropriate for different needs. Analyze the situation and the most significant questions being asked, then weigh the advantages and disadvantages of several techniques. Sometimes a combination of several techniques will provide a reasonable picture of:

- What your community is like -- characteristics of people, types of organizations, values, attitudes, goals, concerns, and problems;
- What is unique about your community.

The following guidelines should be helpful in choosing one or a combination of several needs assessment techniques. At the outset, particular techniques such as a citizens' advisory group, a steering committee, a community forum, or a questionnaire can provide a sharper perspective on local concerns.

First we need to define our objectives:

- What do we want or need to know?
- Why do we want to know it?
- How will the information be used?
- Where can we find the information needed to answer our questions?
- How can we obtain this information?
- What useful information sources already exist at local, regional, state, or federal levels?
- How can the data we obtain be organized, analyzed, and presented?
- What people and organizations should be involved in gathering the information? Why? How?

Try to determine how much it will cost in time, dollars, and other resources to obtain the needed information. Consider what money is available, or where financial help could be obtained. Also, estimate the availability of human resources for planning, compiling, analyzing, and presenting information. If citizen volunteers are the primary means of carrying out the study, they may need to be reimbursed for their expenses, their time may be limited, and they may need guidance and support. On the other hand, highly skilled researchers can often be found in the volunteer community. Do not overlook

agencies, organizations, and businesses that may be interested in community problems. The entire community is a potential resource.

Even though the needs assessment project may have a capable steering committee or the support of local officials, it needs leadership. Determine who is available to assume responsibility for the needs assessment and what their capabilities are to get the job done. Someone needs to be responsible for all the tasks associated with planning, defining the problem, monitoring the expenditure of funds, organizing a plan of operation, guiding the data collection, and serving as liaison. Leadership also includes overseeing data analysis, its presentation, and its use.

The leader does not need to have all the answers or do all of the work. However, he/she should be able to organize, know how to maximize the involvement of all community resources, and understand the research methods used in conducting a needs assessment. At no time is a leader a substitute for community participation. With the right kind of leadership, occasional help from local government staff or a consultant, and willing citizens, a community can produce a useful needs assessment for very little money.

When deciding which assessment technique is best, it is critical to take into account the people who will be involved. People are unique in the way they will respond to an interviewer, a group discussion, or a questionnaire. This consideration alone may justify the use of more than one needs assessment technique.

C. TECHNIQUES USING EXISTING INFORMATION

In every community there is a wide variety of information available if you know where to find it. Before new data is collected, a thorough check should be made of what is already available. This may not only add to your early understanding of the problem, but it could save time and money later. Existing studies or plans often provide insights into the community that most citizens are not aware of.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census conducts a population census every 10 years. With the 2000 Census now complete, the new Census data will provide an excellent source of information on current conditions in the community. Volumes are published about each community's population, including statistics about the structure of a population (size, distribution, and composition) and on demographic processes (fertility, mortality, and migration). General social, economic, and other descriptive information is also presented. Census information is available for public use in a variety of forms. These combine manageable data from the censuses of population, housing, governments, and manufacturing.

Census records can provide an accurate description of how much the local population has grown or declined during a certain period and whether population growth is due to natural increase or due to people moving into or out of the community. These records can also be used to determine whether there has been a change in the number of households or in household composition. Census and vital statistics can also be used to form a detailed breakdown of community residents according to such characteristics as ethnic background, age, sex, marital status, income, education, etc. These records can

also be used to make comparisons between your community and other communities undergoing similar patterns of growth or decline, or to determine whether your community is unique or follows regional or state trends.

☞ **Advantages and Disadvantages of the Census Records for Community Needs Assessment**

Advantages

- Readily available at minimal cost
- Data available on a wide variety of characteristics: population, housing, agriculture, social, economic, health, business, manufacturing, governments, and transportation

Disadvantages

- Great quantity of data may overwhelm the user
- Local community data is frequently limited (especially for small communities), and becomes less current and reliable over time

✓ **For information on current Census records, please view the following website:** http://ceic.commerce.state.mt.us .

D. SURVEY

The survey technique is unique in that it is the only needs assessment method -- other than talking to every citizen -- that has the potential of representing all people in the community. In this respect, it is a relatively inexpensive way to gather information from a large number of people. If a survey is well designed and implemented, the results can be generalized to a larger population.

The survey is based on information collected from a sample of the total community population. On the other hand, a survey can be administered to all people in a community or organization to provide everyone with an equal opportunity to express themselves. The most commonly used survey methods are person-to-person interviews, drop-off and pickup questionnaires, mail questionnaires, and telephone interviews. While each approach is somewhat different, the format is similar. Each asks an individual to supply attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and attributes in response to specific questions.

Survey design offers flexibility in the types of questions that may be asked -- ranging from structured yes-no-undecided responses to unstructured, open-ended responses. Therefore, the survey must be sensitive to psychological barriers, such as length of survey, wording, type of person administering it, and confidentiality, that might affect response.

In some situations, there may be opposition to the use of surveys as a result of recent and continuous misuse of the method. People may not be interested in participating in surveys because they have been polled too many times for too many reasons. Another

reason for resistance is that people are afraid to talk to interviewers because they are afraid to open their door to a stranger; or that people do not want their privacy invaded.

The focus of the survey must be kept in mind, and questions limited to specific and clearly defined needs. For example, a community needs assessment survey could be used to:

- Solicit for alternative solutions to community problems;
- Solicit citizen reactions to specific solutions to community problems and proposals for action;
- Solicit citizen opinions concerning proposed goals for community development;
- Gather information on citizens' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions in order to identify and prioritize community problems;
- Measure changes in attitudes about an attempted solution to a community problem;
- Attempt to make citizens more aware of community problems and their ramifications;
- Assess citizen attitudes about spending public funds on specific projects.

☞ Advantages and Disadvantages of the Survey for Community Needs Assessment

Advantages

- Can be inexpensive, especially if volunteers are available to conduct the survey
- A small, randomly selected sample can provide much information about a population
- Techniques -- mail survey, telephone survey, personal interview, drop-off and pick-up survey -- may be selected in relation to desired cost or response rate
- Can be used to survey an entire population and provide an opportunity for many persons to feel involved in decision-making process
- Can be used to record behaviors as well as opinions; attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and attributes
- Useful if combined with another method -- such as participant observation or case study -- that will provide an interactive perspective or detail

Disadvantages

- To assure statistical validity, random samples must be carefully selected
- Results may not be valid if survey or individual questions are not designed correctly
- May require time and expertise to develop the survey, train interviewers, conduct interviews, and analyze results
- Subject to misinterpretation depending on how questions and response categories are designed
- Tendency for scope of data to be limited -- omission of underlying reasons, and actual behavioral patterns

- One way dialogue: does not allow for exchange of ideas or communication among participants to clarify issues or refine priorities

E. KEY INFORMANT

The "key informant" method is based on obtaining information, over time, from community residents who are in a position to know the community well. The persons selected to be key informants must, therefore, have an in depth knowledge of the community, its services, and its people. It is an excellent way to gather information about past events or ways of life that are no longer observable.

The objectives of the needs assessment can help determine the most appropriate kind of persons to act as key informants. These might include longtime residents, business owners, community leaders, church leaders, and persons representing a variety of life styles, ages, viewpoints, or ethnic backgrounds. Few people in a community will be able to speak about everything; therefore, the problem should be in focus before the informant is selected.

The key informant method requires sufficient time to build a good relationship between investigator and informant. The value of the method is the type of data that can be elicited as a result of the communication and trust that develops between the two. The quality of information obtained is dependent on the ability of the investigator to draw out the key informant's capabilities in perceiving and communicating the information needed.

A variety of methods can be derived for working with a key informant. Questions can be developed in advance, as on a questionnaire or outline, or the approach can be totally unstructured and spontaneous. Several methods applied in combination may produce the best results, including survey, participant observation, and citizen advisory group discussion. Because of its intensive and personal nature, the key informant method is especially useful for:

- Obtaining a deeper knowledge of minority viewpoints, or of "silent majority" opinions;
- Involving citizens in public problem-solving who would be less inclined to answer a questionnaire;
- Raising citizen consciousness about a community problem;
- Showing community leaders that you are interested in obtaining their viewpoints.

☞ Advantages and Disadvantages of the Key Informant Method for Community Needs Assessment

Advantages

- Opportunity to obtain the insiders' view
- Depth of information concerning causes or reasons
- Permits continual clarification of ideas and information
- Can be combined effectively with other techniques
- Permits input from many different individuals

- Can be implemented by community volunteers, thereby building citizen involvement and awareness
- Does not involve high cost

Disadvantages

- Time required to select the best informants and to build trust
- Personal relationship between researcher and informants may influence type of data obtained
- Informants or interviewers may interject their own impressions and biases
- Data may be difficult to quantify
- Should be combined with other methods, because representativeness of total community is difficult to achieve
- Few people can sense all the needs and concerns of all people in a community the perspectives of those who are less visible may be overlooked

F. NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS

Nominal group process is a structured problem solving or idea-generating strategy in which individuals' ideas are gathered and combined in a face-to-face, non-threatening group situation. The process is used in health, social service, and education fields, as well as in industry and government to maximize creative participation in group problem-solving. It assures a balanced input from all participants and takes advantage of each person's knowledge and experience. In a needs assessment, it is very useful for generating and clarifying ideas, reaching consensus, prioritizing, and making decisions on proposed alternative actions.

Step One:
The process typically begins by seating participants at tables in groups of no more than eight. This is usually accomplished by having participants count off by number (1 to whatever number will accomplish dividing the attendees into small groups of eight or less.) Having participants count off also accomplishes separating people that might have arrived together (and might be like-minded) into different groups.

Step Two:
Depending upon the approach the community has decided to take for their needs assessment process, each participant is then asked to write their own thoughts on a sheet of paper without additional discussion. The question posed could be to describe the three major problems the town faces. Or, as in the "20 Clues" exercise in EXHIBIT I, participants might be asked to list "three things that are the best about our town; and then three areas where our town needs work."

Step Three:
Next, the participants in each group share their thoughts with their group. Each person, in turn, describes one item or issue they have listed. (One group member should be asked to serve as a group recorder and write the responses on a flip chart tablet.) The group should proceed around the table, one person at a time, listing one issue at a time, until all of the issues or ideas have been listed. As issues are listed, each one can be

discussed for clarification and evaluation. If some are similar, they can be consolidated or restated.

Step Four:
After all members of the small group have presented their ideas, talk as a group and agree on the group's top three issues or items. Each table should then report to the entire group. When reporting, each table should be asked for one and only one item at a time, then the next table takes a turn at reporting only one item. In this way, duplication can be avoided and each table will have the chance to contribute rather than just confirming the previous report. A master list of issues can be recorded on a flip chart tablet in full view of the group by the discussion leader or facilitator or a volunteer recorder. Some of the issues may require restatement for clarification or may be consolidated with others to create overall understanding by the whole group.

Step Five:
At this point, participants can "vote" by placing self-adhesive dots next to the items they consider most significant. This ranking process works best if participants are asked to pick their top three or five items. The votes or check marks can be tabulated to establish a rank order for the identified issues. Ranking in this way offers an active and visual method of participant involvement. A feeling of consensus usually results, reducing the sense of "winning or losing" that sometimes is involved with a simple majority voting procedure.

Step Six:
The list of items that received the most "votes" can be treated as possible priorities for community action. The ranked items can be used to create a citizen task forces or action teams. Participants can self-select relative to the ranked items depending on their area of interest. Another variation on recruiting for these task forces or action teams might be to post a large sheet of paper for each of the top five items and ask individuals to sign up on the sheet if they are interested in working on that issue. Passing around a tablet or clipboard can also be effective. Sometimes having one individual who will act as a temporary chair for a group will work well, especially if the group then gathers in one section of the room to talk about next steps.

A community advisory group or task force might consider using a nominal group process technique under these circumstances:

- To determine what community problems are of greatest immediate concern;
- To decide on a needs assessment strategy for dealing with the identified problems;
- To design improved community services or programs;
- At a community forum or town meeting where broad citizen input is needed on a proposed plan for land use, transportation, public services or facilities, or school expansion.

☞ **Advantages and Disadvantages of Nominal Group Process for Community Needs Assessment**

Advantages

- If well-organized in advance, a heterogeneous group can move toward definite group conclusions
- Can be used to expand or refine the information obtained from surveys or existing documents, or can be used to generate a more specific list of community assets and liabilities
- Motivates all participants to get involved because they sense they are personally affected
- Generates many ideas in a short period of time; allows for a full range of individual thoughts and concerns
- A good way to obtain input from people of different backgrounds and experiences
- Gives all participants an equal opportunity to express opinions and ideas in a non-threatening setting
- Allows individual generation of ideas without suppression by any dominant group member
- Stimulates creative thinking and effective dialogue
- Allows for clarification of ideas

Disadvantages

- Requires a skilled facilitator
- May be extremely difficult to implement with large audiences unless advance preparation has taken place to train group facilitators and divide participants into groups of 6-10 members
- Process may appear rigid if small group leader does not show flexibility -- encourage agenda building, and show respect for all ideas and concerns
- May be some overlap of ideas due to unclear wording or inadequate group discussion
- "Knowledgeable" individuals selected to participate may not represent all community subgroups
- Assertive personalities may dominate unless leadership skills are exercised
- May not be a sufficient source of data in itself; may require follow-up survey, observations, or documentary analysis
- Inappropriate technique for routine meetings, bargaining, negotiation, or coordination

G. COMMUNITY FORUM

A community forum is based on one or more public meetings to which residents are invited to express their opinions about community problems and needs. With advance planning and the assistance of a steering committee, an enormous amount of information can be obtained in a short time at minimal cost. Skilled leadership and advance organization is needed to motivate a representative public turnout, to assure

maximum participation, to collect information, and to know what to do with the information once it is collected. Usually, the format can incorporate a number of needs assessment techniques, such as nominal group process, key informant, advisory committee, public hearing, and possibly a follow-up survey. It has the potential to narrow the problem on which a later technique may elaborate; to build public awareness of the complexity of an issue; to legitimize the need for further study; to design improved programs and services; or to test public views of proposed solutions to community problems.

Open Houses

A common problem with the conventional public hearing format is the citizens that are most agitated about an issue or proposal will be very vocal and dominate the public comment period. Frequently, persons with more moderate views or who just have questions will be less inclined to speak up in an emotionally charged environment. "Open houses" are a more "low key" public involvement technique which is being used more often, particularly by natural resource agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service or the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This approach can be adapted by communities for their needs assessment and citizen participation processes and used in conjunction with a community forum.

Typically, an open house involves providing a meeting area where visual displays related to an issue can be put up for public viewing. Staff or members of a needs assessment task force or planning board can be posted by the displays to explain the information. For example, in the context of a needs assessment or community planning effort, displays can be provided relating to various community issues such as housing conditions, land use, public facilities, parks and recreation and so on. This could also include plans for improvements to local water or sewer facilities or a new public building. Forms can be provided for people to make written comments or the persons stationed at the displays can take down people's comments for them. Open houses can be scheduled at times when it would be convenient for people to stop by after work, if they have other commitments. Open houses can also be held just prior to a public hearing or a facilitated community forum using a group process so that people can get more information before any public discussion begins.

☞ Advantages and Disadvantages of the Community Forum for Community Needs Assessment

Advantages

- Provides an opportunity for people of diverse back grounds to share ideas and experiences
- Can provide a quick, intensive picture of community concerns
- Can effectively involve local citizens in planning, publicizing, moderating, evaluating, etc.
- Gives community issues broad visibility
- Local citizens feel as though they have been heard
- Inexpensive
- Useful to identify problems, assess needs, or to suggest questions requiring further study

- Design is flexible --a variety of techniques can be incorporated

Disadvantages

- Requires good leadership and advance organization
- Opinions obtained are limited to those who attend- all viewpoints may not be heard
- Poor advance planning and advertising may result in limited participation
- If not well-facilitated, only the vocal minorities will be heard
- A large turnout may prevent everyone from speaking and may limit time allowed for each speaker
- May generate more questions than answers
- May raise citizens' expectations and frustrations if objectives are unclear, or if expectations are not met

H. ADVISORY GROUPS AND TASK FORCES

Advisory groups and task forces are called together for a variety of purposes -- to represent the ideas and attitudes of a community, group, or organization; to make suggestions; to generate new ideas; to advise and to recommend; or to carry out a specific task. Members of such a group may be specially selected or invited to participate because of their unique skills or backgrounds; they may volunteer; they may be nominated or elected; or the group may be formed by a combination of these processes.

Because advisory groups and task forces are formed in a variety of ways, a number of issues should be considered in advance:

- **Composition and selection.** Will it be made up of experts, lay persons, or a combination of both? How will membership be determined? What are advantages and disadvantages of each person to the function of the group?

- **Purpose.** Will the group be formed for the purpose of information dissemination, Information collection, planning, advising, problem resolution, decision-making, policy-making, technical assistance, legitimizing or building support, or creating public awareness?

- **Duration.** Will there be a beginning and an end to the group's responsibilities? How will length of members' service be determined?

- **Method of operation.** Will there be regular and frequent meetings, occasional meetings, communication by mail, conference telephone calls, or a combination of these? Who will assume leadership? How will agreement be reached on issues; by majority vote or a consensus process? How will recommended actions or plans be implemented?

- **Motivation and reward.** How will participants be rewarded for their input? How will their interest in the group's task be developed and retained?

Advisory groups and task forces, especially those of a short-term or specific task orientation, can be invaluable to a community needs assessment. Their functions include:

- Identifying methods for conducting a needs assessment;
- Building community awareness of specific problems;
- Identifying various population and organization groups that should be involved in a community needs assessment;
- Building support for a new public service program;
- Assessing potential impacts of a development;
- Collecting information; evaluating a community program or policy; giving technical assistance or advice.

☞ Advantages and Disadvantages of Advisory Groups and Task Forces for Community Needs Assessment

Advantages

- Opportunity to involve a variety of professional and lay people from diverse backgrounds
- Lay people may see alternatives that are overlooked by experts
- Local residents may have technical expertise or knowledge, particularly about the community in which they live, that professionals do not have
- Increasing numbers of people are demanding to be involved in planning; they cannot be ignored
- When programs encounter difficulties, people who have been involved in planning them have less reason to blame officials for the problems
- Can be an antidote for feelings of alienation, futility, and powerlessness
- Involvement in the planning process often assures acceptance in the implementation phase
- Takes the pressure off the experts; they do not need to have all the answers
- Usually results in more creative problem solving
- May help solidify relationships between interest groups - communication barriers are broken down and mutual trust increases

Disadvantages

- Maximizing the skills of group members may take considerable and time - consuming organization, planning, and training
- Requires a skilled facilitator or leader
- May result in frustration if participants' advice is never taken or if they have no justifiable reason for participation
- Members may become disillusioned if they have not had clear instructions for the reason for participation in the group
- Depending upon selection, members may not necessarily represent all points of view or critical interest groups in the community
- May threaten the authority of decision makers, local officials, and others in formal organizational roles

- Sometimes there is a tendency to overload advisory committees with work, or to give them insufficient time or resources to complete their tasks
- Viewed from perspective of a citizen advisory committee, there may be a tendency to regard it as the only means for obtaining citizen input. Should be considered as one of several methods to obtain public participation

EXHIBIT B

NEEDS ASSESSMENT USING A CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

There is no one recommended procedure that applicants should use in identifying community development needs and possible solutions for those needs. As we noted previously, Montana's CDBG Program encourages local governments to take full advantage of their local planning programs and not unnecessarily duplicate their local planning efforts solely for the purposes of submitting a CDBG application. Frequently, a local government may have already identified community needs and priorities through preparation of a growth policy (comprehensive plan) and MDOC strongly encourages applicants to use their existing growth policy or plan to fulfill this requirement.

In the past, some local governments have assigned the task of identifying needs to an existing local planning board. This approach only makes sense if the planning board's other activities would allow it the time necessary to coordinate the needs assessment process. Many planning boards are so busy performing other duties, such as subdivision review or other planning responsibilities that this just is not a realistic option.

One of the most common approaches used by Montana communities in the past is to establish a citizens committee or task force to prepare the needs assessment. The committee should be composed of 5-7 individuals representing a variety of community interests. The governing body should appoint the committee members. If the community has a planning board, one board member should be appointed to the committee to assure coordination between the planning board and the committee. The planning board member may also be aware of past studies that the community has conducted or other information that will be helpful to the task force. The committee should conduct regular meetings. The citizens committee can use a variety of techniques to help it identify community needs and involve other citizens in the process, including community-wide town meetings, neighborhood meetings, or community surveys. Whatever approach is followed, the community must meet the minimum CDBG citizen participation requirements described previously.

The following is an example of a work program which outlines a basic sequence of events for using a citizen committee to prepare a needs assessment and an application for CDBG funding (or funding from any other state or federal program or private foundation.)

A. CREATE COMMITTEE

Refer to previous discussion.

B. ORGANIZATION

1. Elect a secretary - keep a chronological record of the needs assessment process so that you will be able to summarize the process (this is important for CDBG applications). Keep records of meetings and copies of all work products.

2. Develop work program and assign areas of individual responsibility (for example, one member gathers data on housing, one person assembles information on public facilities, etc.).

3. Set deadlines and create a task "time line" or schedule.

4. Put together a plan for informing local citizens and involving them in the needs assessment process. This should include developing methods to actively solicit citizen views (particularly those of low and moderate income residents if the community may apply for CDBG funds). Assign members to contact community groups and talk to people in person, determine who will contact the media, publicize the needs assessment process, and set the times for the public meetings. The secretary should keep a brief record of the efforts to involve the public such as meeting minutes, copies of newspaper clippings, attendance lists at meetings, etc.

C. INFORMATION AND DATA GATHERING

1. Review any existing community plans or studies (e.g., growth policy, comprehensive plan), engineering or environmental studies, capital improvements plan, housing condition surveys, public opinion surveys, downtown studies, etc.) to identify community needs, goals and policies.

2. Acquire any information you feel is important for your assessment, such as U.S. Census data or other baseline information.

3. Contact community groups and attend their meetings to solicit their views.

4. Interview “key informants” such as long-time residents, local government officials and staff, the local newspaper editor, leaders of the business community, and other community leaders who may be knowledgeable about long-term community issues or problems or who may have additional insights. (The “key informant” approach for soliciting public opinion is discussed further in EXHIBIT A.) Frequently, these key members of the community or local government may be aware of critical issues of which the general public is unaware.

D. SOLICITING PUBLIC OPINION

To encourage additional public involvement, the citizens committee and local officials can hold a town meeting or open house or even conduct a community opinion survey.

Various options for soliciting public opinion and involving the public are discussed in more detail in later EXHIBITS.

E. PREPARING THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR CDBG APPLICATIONS

In the context of preparing an application for CDBG funding, this step is the heart of the community needs assessment process. The Federal Housing and Community Development Act requires that each CDBG recipient "identify its community development and housing needs, including the needs of low and moderate-income persons, and the activities to be undertaken to meet such needs."

To meet this requirement, the Montana CDBG Program requires that each local government applicant for a Housing and Community Revitalization or Public Facilities CDBG project provide a narrative which describes:

1. **The applicant's overall community development needs, including the needs of low and moderate income persons, and the activities or actions it plans to meet the identified needs;**

2. **The process used by the applicant to identify overall community development needs and the activities it plans to meet the identified needs; and**

3. **The rationale for selecting the proposed CDBG project.**

The narrative will typically be incorporated as part of the applicant's response to the "Community Planning and Needs Assessment" ranking criterion used for both the Housing and Community Revitalization and Public Facilities grant categories.

At this point in your local needs assessment process, you will need to evaluate the information and citizen comments you have obtained and try to answer the following questions:

- **What are our major community development and housing needs or problems?**

- **How do the needs rank against one another in terms of the community's priority for dealing with them? In what order should we try to solve the problems or do some need to be addressed simultaneously?**

- **What can we do about them? What activities can be undertaken to deal with each need?**

- **What resources are available to help us deal with them? (For example, local, state or federal or private foundations.)**

- **Should the community apply for state or federal assistance to address any of these needs?**

- **When should we tackle these problems? What is our schedule for dealing with them?**

A common reaction for communities at this point in their needs assessment process is:

"All right, we've had our public meetings (or conducted our community survey or both) and we have a list of community needs identified. How do we decide on priorities for working on them (or which ones are best suited for assistance from various state or federal programs or private foundations)?"

For example, the project proposed in the community's CDBG application does not have to be the highest priority community need. There are a number of reasons, including the availability of other more appropriate local, state or federal public resources or private foundation grants, which would justify submitting an application for other than the top-ranked community need. Another reason is that certain types of projects historically have been more competitive under particular state or federal programs. In other cases, local elected officials are more aware of certain needs than are the general public. For example, frequently local citizens may cite streets surfacing or recreational facilities as a top priority because they are visible problems, while a city council is more concerned that the city's water quality is in violation of state health standards and the city faces fines if it does not improve local facilities. All of these are legitimate rationales for a local government to submit an application for a project which may have ranked lower as a community need through a community survey or during public meetings. <u>However, it is important that the rationale for selecting the proposed project be explained</u>.

One approach used by several communities to define the priority of their community needs is to develop criteria to rank the various needs. Sometimes a community may have two or more needs that could be considered for a possible project. The use of ranking criteria can provide an objective means to help the community establish priorities for dealing with needs, and decide on whether to apply for a particular state or federal program for help. Examples of the types of criteria that have been used by other communities include:

(a) the need involves the community's compliance with a law or regulation which has been mandated by a governmental agency;

(b) the community faces an existing or potential threat to public health or safety;

(c) the need is one that relates to the mission of a particular state or federal program. For example, in the CDBG context, if the problem especially affects low or moderate income families, such as substandard housing conditions or homelessness, unemployment, or the payment of public facility assessments for low income families, it may be more appropriate for a program such as CDBG;

(d) the need affects the entire community as opposed to one neighborhood;

(e) the need is one on which a strong community consensus exists;

(f) the need is a long-term problem which has been identified in past plans or studies, or solution of the problem would have a long-term positive impact on the viability of the whole community;

(g)) the need is one for which state or federal financial assistance is more likely to be available ; and

(h) the need is more likely to be competitive under particular state or federal grant programs.

As a final step, the needs assessment committee should summarize the recommendations made relative to the major needs which were identified and how they were finally ranked in order of priority. This documentation can consist of reference to community plans or studies, written comments, charts, or maps.

During the last several years, an increasing number of local governments have prepared long-range capital improvements plans (CIP's) for their communities. A CIP outlines the community's long-range plan (usually five years) for major community investments such as water and wastewater systems, streets, storm sewers, parks, and so on. A CIP can help communities reduce the costs to construct, maintain, or repair public facilities by identifying local public facility needs, establish project priorities, and creating a program for the scheduling and funding of construction or repair projects.

Overall Community Improvement Plan

More recently, several communities have broadened the CIP concept to prepare what might be termed an Overall Community Improvement Plan. Some communities have termed theirs an “Action Plan” or “Strategic Plan.” These plans include the public facilities needs typically found in a CIP and, in addition, incorporate overall community projects such those related to economic development, housing, social services, etc. This more comprehensive approach provides an excellent format to bring all of a community's priority needs together for comparison and can be a very useful way to portray a community's overall needs and opportunities for community improvements to the public. Summarizing the community's priorities in this manner can give local officials and residents a "road map" for community improvement projects over the long term. For example, Missoula County has used this approach in the past. As the previous examples of the Community Action Plans prepared by Corvallis and Darby demonstrate, this approach is “do-able” for even Montana's smaller communities.

An outline of what might be included in an Overall Community Improvement Plan would be:

a. an inventory of existing public facilities and services, and a description of economic and housing conditions

b. population projections for the community and an analysis of their potential impact on existing public facilities and services and economic and housing conditions

c. identification of possible community improvement projects, ranked according to their relative priority

d. a listing of the year in which each project would be scheduled to be started and completed

e. the estimated cost of each project

f. a listing of the potential funding sources for each project and potentially available amounts of assistance

g. identification of any prerequisites or special requirements associated with the listed potential funding sources that will have to be dealt with

The Community Action Plans prepared by the small communities of Corvallis and Darby that were described earlier are good examples of a more comprehensive overall community improvement plan that goes beyond the more narrow public facilities or infrastructure focus of a Capital Improvements Plan.

F. BEGIN GRANT APPLICATION PREPARATION

1. If the community has decided to apply for state or federal funds, one person should be assigned as the "ramrod" to be in charge of preparing the grant application (or applications) and assembling the required forms and documentation. That person could be the local planning director, an engineer, a public-spirited volunteer, or a private grant writing consultant.

2. The role of the needs assessment committee is to assist that person by gathering any additional information which may be necessary for grant preparation, and by reviewing the draft of the application and suggesting improvements before it is submitted.

G. PRIOR TO SUBMITTING THE CDBG APPLICATION, HOLD THE SECOND PUBLIC HEARING

The purpose of the second public hearing is to give citizens and potential beneficiaries of the proposed project adequate opportunity to review and comment on the community's CDBG application, before it is submitted. The issues which should be considered include the proposed project location, proposed activities, budget, and any costs that will be imposed on residents as a result of the project (particularly those of low and moderate income). For example, if the CDBG funds will partially fund a public facility project that will result in increased user charges or a property tax assessment, make sure local citizens are aware of this and are supportive of the proposal, before the city proceeds with the CDBG application.

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This completes the outline of one approach to a needs assessment process. This is only an example. The approach used by each community has to be tailored to its own unique situation.

EXHIBIT C

TIPS FOR CONDUCTING A TOWN MEETING OR PUBLIC HEARING

A town meeting can be used for the first of the two public hearings required under the CDBG program. The first hearing is designed to solicit public comment on community needs and priorities, including the needs of low and moderate income persons. The purpose of the first hearing is to solicit ideas on ways to deal with any community problems and to give citizens an opportunity to propose possible projects before the local officials make a decision regarding what types of projects they may apply for. The following ideas may help you plan a more effective town meeting (public hearing).

Key Elements of a Successful Public Meeting or Hearing

PURPOSE: There should be a good reason to meet. It might be gathering information about local needs, in general, or hearing public comment about a particular project.

Notice: For a successful meeting, people need to be notified. People need to know to come, why they should attend, and when and where to go.

- Use handbills, public notices in the newspaper or on the radio or cable TV, posters in grocery stores, laundromats and the post office, put notices in water bills, and send letters to community organizations and leaders to tell them why they should come, when, and where to go. Some communities and newspapers have their own website on the Internet that can be used for public meeting notices.

- The leaders of community organizations could be asked to announce the town meeting at their group's next meeting.

- For newspaper notices of the hearing, use a regular display ad with large block type instead of burying the notice in a legal advertisement that few people will look at.

- One Montana community used an innovative approach: members of the Needs Assessment Committee used the town's ambulance to drive through neighborhoods and invited citizens to their meeting over the ambulance loudspeaker.

PREPARATION: Arrangements must be made for a proper meeting place and time. Any necessary handouts or visual aids need to be prepared. Refreshments need to be arranged -- coffee and cookies always help.

- Some communities have offered a drawing for door prizes to encourage a better turn out.

- Try to avoid having your town meeting conflict with regularly scheduled meetings of other local organizations or other community activities such as athletic events.

- Make sure the facilities are adequate for the meeting, including size, seating, lighting, and depending upon the season, with sufficient heating or cooling . Arrange for a sound system or audio-visual equipment, if necessary.

AGENDA: An agenda must be prepared. Public meetings and hearings need clear and fair rules about the procedure to be followed. An agenda, especially one that is available to the public before the meeting, or that is passed out as people arrive, helps people prepare themselves to participate. By sticking to the agenda, the meeting organizers can run the meeting or hearing more efficiently, allow adequate time for public participation, and avoid confusion. A sample agenda is shown at the end of this exhibit.

PARTICIPANTS: Make sure the right people have been invited to the meeting and will be there.

RESULTS: Be sure to take time at the end of the meeting to reflect on the meeting and summarize what was accomplished or concluded.

RECORDS: A record of the meeting should be kept. For CDBG grant application purposes, a list of the time, place, participants, a summary of public comments, and the results of the meeting are adequate. For formal public hearings by a governing body or planning board, minutes may be required. Meeting organizers should have all participants sign in with names and addresses, particularly if they will attempt any follow up meetings or mailings.

The following is an example of an agenda for a town meeting:

AGENDA

I. Welcome - Mayor/Commissioners (10 minutes)

II. Presentations by Community Needs Assessment Committee (30 minutes)

Individual committee members present their preliminary findings.

III. Small Group Discussion (see EXHIBIT A for a more detailed discussion of the Nominal Group Process.) Set a time limit that is long enough for the groups to think and discuss but short enough to conclude the meeting at a reasonable time, for example, 45 minutes.

Participants divide into small groups (not more than 6-8 people). While the small group process can be varied, one approach would be for members of each small group to write their individual ideas on paper. Feedback from each person then follows, with each person's concerns being listed on a flip chart in full view; next,

each idea is discussed for clarification and evaluation. Priorities are ordered by group voting; group discussion of the ballot results rounds out the process.

IV. General Discussion - spokesperson from each group presents list of issues, needs or priorities.)

1. Small group presentations (30 minutes)

2. General discussion to define overall issues/needs/priorities

3. Closure – allow enough time to summarize what has been done and consider what still needs to be accomplished.

   ~ Review the results of the group process.
   ~ Summarize points of general agreement.
   ~ Outline a plan for further action.
   ~ Summarize what has been accomplished.

(Make a record of the results for the CDBG application)

V. Closing and Thanks to Participants - Mayor/Commissioner (5 minutes)

EXHIBIT D

SUGGESTIONS FOR PLANNING AND CONDUCTING CDBG COMMUNITY SURVEYS

A. INTRODUCTION

If you feel you need additional information on community needs or public opinion regarding local needs, you may want to conduct a community opinion survey. A community survey can be a useful tool for identifying community needs or concerns and for documentation to meet the requirements of the CDBG Program. It also provides an opportunity to learn more about your community by giving citizens a chance to say what they want for and from the community. By having citizens participate in making decisions that affect them, it also assures them that their thoughts are important. In addition, a survey can help community leaders make difficult choices, set needed priorities, and design effective programs and projects.

The survey can be done before or after conducting the first required public meeting. Several communities have done the survey as part of their information gathering process and reported the results at their first public meeting to start off the discussion of community issues.

B. DESIGNING THE SURVEY

When designing a questionnaire, the community must decide on the purpose of the survey and what kind of information is needed. Once this decision is made, the actual questions can be written. This requires careful planning to maintain survey reliability and validity. How the questions are grouped, worded and the sequence within the groups are important considerations. There should be several styles of questions asked: yes-no, multiple choice, rating scale, etc.

MDOC CDBG staff have prepared a model survey format which can be adapted by CDBG applicants. Titled "Model Community Opinion Survey Form" (see Exhibit H), the form provides examples of the types of questions which can be asked to help identify local citizens' perceptions of needs and priorities for community development.

The survey must be tailored to fit your community. The model survey is intended to list the variety of questions that can be asked and will not fit every community's needs or situation.

If the community plans to apply for CDBG funds, the community survey can also be modified to determine the community's eligibility for CDBG assistance, if data from the U. S. Census Bureau is inadequate or out of date. For more information on how to do an income survey that will meet MDOC requirements, see the MDOC publication, Documenting Benefit to Low and Moderate Income Persons before you include questions regarding household income in your survey. CDBG applicants may also

choose to combine elements from the opinion survey and the income survey into a single survey format.

There are several important points to keep in mind when designing a survey questionnaire:

1. **Do not use the survey to do everything - keep it simple.**

   There are all sorts of reasons for conducting a survey. One of the very first things a community needs to decide is what it wants to accomplish and what kind of information is really needed. In most cases, a local government is trying to identify community needs and problems. Sometimes other community groups will want to add other questions to the survey once they know the city or some other group is preparing a community-wide survey. The local government should be cautious in expanding the scope of the survey. It can become confusing and require significantly more time in its preparation, implementation, and interpretation.

2. **Consider beginning the questionnaire or survey with a positive approach.**

   A survey should begin with a question that peaks the interest of the respondent such as, "What do you consider the most important improvement in the community in the past five years?" or "what do you like about living in this community?"

3. **Avoid leading questions.**

   A question such as, "Do you think the city needs better services?" leads the respondent to an easy answer of yes. Most citizens would feel that there is always some room for improvement. It is better to ask respondents to rate specific items provided in the questionnaire and to use a checklist with different categories, such as "Very Important," "Important," "Not Important," and "No Opinion." A questionnaire should always allow respondents to indicate they have no opinion, since it should not force or direct answers.

4. **Avoid questions that require more information than the public normally would have.**

   A question such as, "Do you think the town should operate its own police department or should the city enter into a service contract with the county sheriff?" may require specific information about workload and personnel, legal constraints, costs and efficiency, and other administrative issues that the average citizen would not have.

5. **Do not raise false hopes.**

   Be careful as you prepare the survey to avoid questions of statements that might raise false expectations. A question such as, "Would you support a Community Development Block Grant application to the Montana Department of Commerce for $500,00 so we can improve our water system at no cost to the city?," could

raise hopes that might not be realized (and it also violates Rule "C", above, because it is a leading question).

6. **Give respondents a reasonable deadline.**

   People are more apt to respond if they know the task is important enough to have a deadline.

7. **Provide the name and phone number of someone they can contact if respondents have any questions or concerns about the survey or the application.**

C. SAMPLE SIZE

If a community has, for example, 1,000 households, it could be time consuming and expensive to interview every single one, especially if done on a door-to-door basis. In these cases, it may be more efficient to a survey only a portion of the total population and use that portion to represent a cross section of the entire community. A "sample" is the portion of the total population that is to be surveyed. The total population may be a neighborhood, a county water and sewer district, or a town or county that is served by a public facility. The total population from which you take the sample will be the area that is served by the CDBG-funded project.

To be reasonably certain that the sample is a statistically valid representation of the entire population, it must include a minimum amount of households, which varies according to the size of the total population. To continue the example above, if the community surveyed only 50 out of the 1,000 households, there would be a good chance that many of those 50 are not representative of the entire community. This would be especially true if all 50 were selected from a specific neighborhood, instead of randomly.

In order to document that local income surveys have been conducted with a sound methodology, the Department of Commerce uses a formula which sets a minimum sample size for the survey, according to the population of the project area. Some communities choose to survey all local residents through mailed surveys; in these cases, the sample size requirement is easiest to meet.

The MDOC sample size requirement does not apply to community opinion surveys however, local officials will want to make sure that the results of any opinion survey provide a statistically valid representation of the views of local citizens. For this reason local officials should try to get responses from a reasonable percentage of households consistent with the MDOC survey sample requirement.

There are many complex formulas for determining how large a sample you must have in order to be reasonable confident that the sample accurately reflects your population. The formula used by the Department of Commerce is relatively simple and has been

accepted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) since 1979, as follows:

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{25}{.000625 + \dfrac{25}{\text{population size}}}$$

For the purposes of most local surveys, the population size is the number of households in your community, not the number of individuals, since doing a local survey on the basis of households, rather than individual persons, will be easier to accomplish. For example, if your community has 1,000 households, as in the example above, your sample size would be calculated as follows:

$$\frac{25}{.000625 + \dfrac{25}{1000}} = \frac{25}{.000625 + .000250} = \frac{25}{.000875} = 286$$

The table at the end of this exhibit lists various populations and the sample sizes needed in order to validate a survey. It should be noted that sample size is the number of actual responses received in a survey, not just the number of households contacted. There will always be some households that do not choose to respond, and that being the case, the community should be prepared to make additional efforts, such as a follow-up mailing or more door-to-door interviews, until it has an adequate number of responses. Another way to deal with non-response is to over sample. If you need 250 surveys returned for a statistically valid sample, try to mail surveys to 500 households.

Communities conducting CDBG income surveys as part of a needs assessment survey must sample at least the minimum number of households established by the formula for their population. This does not mean that you hope to get a return of surveys that approximates the sample size. The returned surveys must be random and meet the minimum number required by the formula for the sample size.

Note: In 1997, at the request of MDOC, HUD approved a change in the sample size requirement for local income surveys. The formula for survey sample size shown above requires a larger percentage of responses as total population decreases. This has proved a serious obstacle for very small communities. For example, using this formula, a community of 40 households would have to have a 90% response to be valid. However, under the new standard, if the number of households in the survey area is 200 or less, the minimum percentage of households which must respond to have a valid sample is 67%.

D. RANDOM SELECTION OF HOUSEHOLDS TO BE SURVEYED

In addition to having a large enough sample, the households to be surveyed must be chosen at random so that the results will not be biased. In other words, everyone who is included in the total population to be served by your project should have an equal chance of being included in the sample. Before you can take a random sample, you must first find a way to identify individual households in your project area. For mailed or telephone surveys, many communities have used voter registration rolls, telephone

books, or motor vehicle registration records to provide a comprehensive list to begin with. None of these lists is perfect, but all are generally available and usable.

Determine the interval you will sample by dividing your sample size into your population size. If, for instance, you have 400 households and plan to sample 200 of them, you should take every other name or for a door-to-door survey, visit every other house. (You may want to roll a dice to decide at which name or house you will start, rather than simply starting with the first one.) Another method is to write down all the household addresses in your project area, mix them up in a hat, and draw the number of house addresses you will need to meet your sample size. A random numbers table may also be used. Contact your CDBG liaison if you wish to use this method and do not have access to or know how to use the table.

For door-to-door surveys, each unit in a multi-family structure, such as an apartment, should be counted as a separate address. Call-back visits should be made to sample residences where no one was available for the initial interview. If the call-back visit is also unsuccessful, the next address in sequence should be interviewed. Often if no one is home in the day, they may be in during the evening, so if the original visit was in the daytime, the call-back should be scheduled for evening.

E. PUBLICITY

People are more likely to respond to an income survey if they know there is a good reason for the survey. If the community survey is well publicized, there will be a minimum of lost time in explanations and a more favorable reception by the public. Under no circumstances should a survey be attempted without wide publicity first. Citizens are understandably hesitant to respond to a survey unless the purpose and need for the information is clearly understood. A short cover letter with a mailed questionnaire will let people know why the information is important and that you care about the results. Be specific about why you are conducting the survey. (Sample cover letters are included in Exhibits F and G.)

Complete honesty with the public and cooperation with and from the media can make a difference between success and failure. Publicity can include radio announcements or call-in talk programs, newspaper articles, flyers in the monthly water bill, and posters in local grocery stores or the post office.

F. DISTRIBUTION AND COLLECTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The following are various ways to conduct the actual income survey:

1. Distribution of the questionnaire by mail, requesting mail return;
2. Distribution in public places or in the newspaper, requesting mail return;
3. Distribution door-to-door to be either returned by mail or picked up by someone; and
4. Direct door-to-door interviews by an individual surveyor.

In deciding how to administer the questionnaire, you should consider several factors: time, cost, available personnel, and desired rate of return. You might send interviewers

out to visit each household and ask the questions at that time; you might use a community service group (Boy or Girl Scouts, Kiwanis, etc.) to drop off and pick up the questionnaires, allowing respondents to answer them at their leisure; you could conduct the survey by telephone, or mail. Each survey technique has advantages and disadvantages.

Mailed Questionnaires

Experience has shown that survey forms sent through the mail generally have a low percentage of return. Better results are obtained with volunteers who personally distribute and collect the questionnaire. (One community received a 55% return rate by utilizing local Boy Scouts; another had a 56% return by using a high school social studies class to distribute questionnaires and pick them up a week later.) If you plan to mail or drop off the questionnaire, you should add a cover letter (preferably from the community's chief elected official) explaining why the survey is being conducted and what the results will be used for.

It is also wise to provide a stamped, addressed envelope for return of the questionnaire to help assure the respondent that the information will be confidential. Mail surveys provide better assurance of confidentiality, particularly if you are also requesting household income information. While guaranteeing confidentiality, make sure you have a way to follow-up to improve your response rate. One method is to number each return envelope before you mail the survey and keep a list of matching addresses and numbers. That way you can send out a second mailing to those who did not respond. This will also provide a means for the Department of Commerce to verify your income survey by spot checking a sample of the people who submitted forms. Some communities have color-coded their survey forms to help them determine if particular neighborhoods have concentrations of low and moderate income families.

A weakness of mailed surveys is that survey forms are usually completed only by those who are most interested, or those who will take the time to read the questions and respond. In addition, if there is some uncertainty about the question's intent or the purpose of the survey (such as household income surveys), an individual may not respond. Written questions, even with careful instructions, may not be understood by some respondents, and they may answer in a manner not consistent with the intent of the question.

The Town of Bridger, Montana used the country's lottery mania to increase the response to their local survey. Local officials placed numbered coupons for those who responded to the mailed survey in a drawing. The grand prize winner received $200 in "Bridger Bucks," script which was redeemable for merchandise at local businesses. Local merchants also donated gift certificates for other winners to support the survey effort. The town received far more responses to their survey than the required minimum sample. This technique has been used successfully by several other Montana communities since Bridger "pioneered" this approach.

Door-to-Door Interviews

The most reliable and accurate method of conducting a survey is going door-to-door by trained interviewers. The survey team or individual asks each question on the survey form. When the survey process is approached this way, the two-way communication allows for clarification of questions, as well as assuring more complete coverage and response from the community. Every household selected for sampling can be surveyed, or at least returned to several times in an attempt to complete the survey. It is a more personal approach and is a way to convey the importance of the income survey to each household.

A disadvantage of the personal interview is that it cannot provide the level of privacy assured by a mailed questionnaire. Some people may be hesitant to disclose income levels or similar personal information. One compromise approach which has been used by some communities is to take a printed questionnaire door to door. The respondent can complete the questionnaire individually, place the questionnaire in a sealed envelop, and either return it to the interviewer immediately or by mail. This approach has the advantage of offering greater privacy while, at the same time, the interviewer is available to explain the reason for and importance of the survey or to clarify any of the questions on the survey. Where questionnaires will be picked up immediately, they should be very brief, such as those asking only household income information.

Be sure to pretest the survey to identify any problems or unclear questions, then train everyone involved to be consistent in administering the survey.

G. INTERPRETING AND REPORTING THE RESULTS

The survey results should be tabulated and summarized. Interpretation of the survey results involves summing like responses to individual questions. One of the most frequent weaknesses with local opinion surveys is that the process stops here with a tabulation of the responses. If the survey effort is to be worthwhile, it is critical that the local officials and citizens involved in the survey effort take the time to carefully consider what the survey responses are saying. Try to identify trends and draw conclusions. After the results have been thoroughly analyzed, a report should be issued to the city council or county commission. It is often very helpful to illustrate results using graphs or bar charts. In addition to briefing local officials, the public should be informed through the media and through a community meeting or forum. (Summaries of the results should be provided to the local newspaper and radio or TV stations.) Local officials or members of a Needs Assessment Committee can also make presentations to community groups to discuss the results and get their feed back.

H. CONCLUSION

A common weakness in the use of a community opinion survey is that not all citizens may be equally informed of the various issues or problems facing the community. For example, citizens may often identify street repairs or recreation facilities as a major need, while the town council places water or sewer improvements at the top because

only they are aware that the community is facing state compliance action to bring their facility up to federal or state water quality standards. The public meetings involved in preparing a needs assessment can be a valuable means of educating citizens about the critical issues facing the community and why sometimes costly remedial action must take place.

All applications for CDBG funds involve data gathering of some kind, whether it is a matter of researching census data, using records from a local agency, or actually conducting a community survey specifically for the application. If you have questions about the design of a questionnaire or possible alternative sources of information, please call the MDOC CDBG staff at the Local Government Assistance Division, 444-2488.

✓ EXHIBIT E

MINIMUM SAMPLE REQUIRED FOR SURVEY RESULTS TO BE CONSIDERED VALID

Number of Households In Project Area	Minimum Number of Households in Sample	Percentage of Responses Required
200 or less	200 or less	67%
250	154	62%
300	171	57%
350	187	53%
400	200	50%
450	212	47%
500	222	44%
600	240	40%
700	255	36%
800	267	33%
900	277	31%
1,000	286	29%
2,000	333	17%
3,000	353	12%
4,000	364	9%
5,000	370	7%
6,000	375	6%
7,000	378	5%
8,000	381	5%
9,000	383	4%
10,000+	400	4%

EXHIBIT F

SAMPLE COVER LETTER FOR A MAILED COMMUNITY SURVEY

(This format can be adopted according to the survey technique to be used.)

(Date)

Dear Resident:

The (Town of ______________________, City of ______________________, or County) is currently assessing its needs for community improvements. As part of this process, we need your help to tell us what you think our biggest problems and issues are and to help us find ways to make our community a better place to live.

Attached, you will find a short questionnaire. We would appreciate it if you could take the time to complete and return it to us. The more people that respond, the more the results will accurately represent the views of all of our citizens.

Please answer all the questions as best you can. If there are differences of opinion among your family, please select the answer which best represents the view of the majority of family members.

We are conducting this survey because (jurisdiction) may apply to the Montana Department of Commerce for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to improve our community. Some of the questions, such as those relating to income, may seem rather personal. However, this information will be extremely important if we apply for these funds because Congress intended the CDBG program for community development activities that primarily benefit low and moderate income persons. Your response to the survey helps us demonstrate that. We hope that you will cooperate as fully as possible.

An envelope has been provided to insure that your individual response will be kept strictly confidential. The information we receive from you will be confidential and will be used only in an overall summary.

After completing the questionnaire, put it in the enclosed envelope and return it with your water bill.

If you have questions regarding this survey, please contact (city clerk, planning director, etc.) at (telephone).

Thank you for taking the time to help us.

Sincerely,

(name)
(title)

MDOC strongly encourages coding survey forms by number so that local staff can make follow up telephone calls to households which have not returned their surveys. This is especially important for CDBG income surveys where it is critical to receive a minimum number of completed responses.

EXHIBIT G

TOWN OF BRIDGER, MONTANA COVER LETTER

Dear Citizen of Bridger,

You can be of service to your community through the simple act of filling out the enclosed questionnaire. In addition, YOU MAY WIN $200.00!

To win, you must fill out the questionnaire completely. Each question must be answered for you to be eligible for the $200.00 prize. Tear off the numbered tab and keep it handy for the drawing. Return your completed questionnaire by May 15, in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. By doing so, you will automatically have entered the drawing for the $200.00 in Bridger Bucks worth $200.00 at any Bridger business.

What is the Purpose of the Questionnaire?

As you may know, the Clarks Fork Valley is passing through troubled times. People in Bridger are feeling the pinch and, while it is certain that the community will survive, it is also certain that many community members will suffer the financial effects of these troubled times.

Our town may, through effort, persistence, and ingenuity, qualify for federal money which Congress has set aside to help communities in just this situation grow out of their economic troubles.

The first step toward obtaining some of that available money is to conduct a survey of the wants and needs of the members of the community. The enclosed questionnaire will give us some idea of what you think. It is to be anonymous -- you need not sign your name. But, it is essential to this effort that one questionnaire be completed for each household.

Please help us, and your neighbors, by filling out the questionnaire and returning to City Hall by May 15th, in the enclosed envelope.

Remember, you will be helping your community and you may be the winner of $200.00! Thank you.

Sincerely,

Bridger Town Council
Bridger Development Corporation
Bridger Business Association

EXHIBIT H

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

MODEL COMMUNITY OPINION SURVEY FORM

Note: The survey questions below are only examples. The questions an the format must be tailored by each community to reflect local concerns and problems.

GENERAL

1. How do you rate (city/county) as a place to live? (Check one)

_____ Good
_____ Average
_____ Poor

2. What do you like best about living in this area?______________________________

____

How many years have you lived in this area?

_____ 3. Less than 5 years
_____ 4. 5 to 10 Years
_____ 5. More than 10 years

AGE OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

_____ 6. 18 to 29
_____ 7. 30 to 39
_____ 8. 40 to 49
_____ 9. 50 to 65
_____ 10. Over 65

EDUCATION OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

_____ 11. Less than nine years.
_____ 12. Nine to eleven years.
_____ 13. High School
_____ 14. Vocation Training
_____ 15. College
_____ 16. Graduate School

EDUCATION			
YES	NO	NO OPINION	
			17. Does our public school system offer a quality educational program comparable to other public schools of similar size in Montana?
Are you satisfied with the quality of the following educational programs?			
			18. General Education
			19. Vocational Training
			20. College Preparation
			21. Music
			22. Athletics
			23. Adult Basic Education
			24. Adult Continuing Education
HEALTH			
What additional health services are needed in our community?			
			24. Women, Infant & Children Programs
			25. Convalescent Homes
			26. Nursing Homes / Assisted Living Facilities
			27. Physician Specialists (Please Explain)
			28. Dentists
			29. Visiting Nurses
			30. Emergency Medical Technicians
			31. Other (Please Explain)
			32. Do you feel improved alcohol and drug dependence programs should be implemented?
RECREATION			

YES	NO	NO OPINION	
What recreational facilities require improvements and/or development?			
			33. Playground and Community Parks
			34. Pedestrian/Bicycle Paths
			35. Ice Skating Rinks
			36. Covered All Season Swimming Pool
			37. Basketball/Tennis Courts
			38. Sports Playing Fields (Please Explain)
			39. Golf Courses
			40. Camping Sites
			41. Picnic Areas and Public Rest Rooms
			42. Other
Are the community's existing recreational opportunities adequate for the following age groups?			
			43. Preschool
			44. Elementary
			45. High School
			46. Young Adults
			47. Middle Age
			48. Senior Citizens
			49. What additional recreational programs should be offered?
What is the most effective way to fund recreational facilities and activities? (rank your three (3) most important choices as 1st, 2nd, 3rd.)			
			50. Mill Levy Increase
			51. User Fee
YES	NO	NO OPINION	

			52. Membership Fee
			53. Additional Fee Paid by All Residents
			54. Donations
			55. Other (Please Explain)
			56. Describe additional recreational programs that should be organized.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT			
What percentage of your family purchases are made in the community?			
			57. Less than 50%
			58. 50% to 75%
			59. More than 75%
			60. What products/services do you generally purchase outside the city?
What additional commercial services are needed in our community?			
			61. Family Restaurants
			62. Fast-Food Franchises
			63. Adult Clothing Shops
			64. Children's Clothing Shops
			65. Discount Stores
			66. Entertainment Establishments
			67. Other (Please Explain)
What other services should local retail establishments offer?			
			68. Additional Sales Promotions
YES	**NO**	**NO OPINION**	
			69. Larger Selection of Items

			70. More Courteous and Helpful Service
			71. Satisfactory Repair Services
			72. Other (Please Explain)
			73. Would you take advantage of extended shopping hours during evenings/weekends?
			74. When?
			75. Do you think that improving the appearance of the downtown business buildings would significantly attract more customers?
			76. Would you support a sign ordinance and review process to promote improved business signs downtown?
			77. Is public parking in the downtown area adequate?
Do you feel the following kinds of financing are sufficiently provided by local sources?			
			78. Mortgages
			79 Home Improvement Loans
			80. Business Loans
			81. Are any members of your household looking for work in the area?
			82. How many?
			83. Are more employment opportunities needed in the community?
Specify the types of employment opportunities most desirable. (Rank your choices in order of priority as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.)			
YES	NO	NO OPINION	
			84. Agricultural Product Processing (Meat, Feed)
			85. Forest Product Processing (Lumber, Specialty Wood Products)
			86. Heavy Industry

			87. Light Manufacturing
			88. Mining
			89. Construction
			90. Retail Trade
			91. Tourism
			92. Other (Please Explain)
			93. Do you feel efforts to attract new industry and support expansion of existing industry are adequate?
What economic development activities should be considered to promote new and existing industry?			
			94. Issuing industrial development revenue bonds to help industries acquire land and construct buildings, without a tax increase for local citizens.
			95. Business Development and Management Assistance.
			96. Lower Taxes for New Industry
			97. Offset Training Costs for New Employees
			98. Tourism Promotion Programs
			99. Other (Please Explain)
YES	**NO**	**NO OPINION**	
			100. Should local government expend more effort to encourage local businesses to expand rather than to attract new industry?
			101. Should the city support efforts to promote local products/services outside this area?
HOUSING			
102. Do you own or rent your residence? _______ own _______ rent			
103. Please indicate on the following list of typical housing problems if your dwelling unit has any of these. (Check all that apply)			

	Inadequate plumbing (leaks in water or sewer pipes, gas leaks, etc.)
	Inadequate wiring (bare or exposed wires, lights dim when other appliances turn on, less than two outlets in each room, inoperable outlets, etc.)
	Soot or smoke from fireplace or heater, kitchen stove, or fumes from furnace or heaters, etc.
	Walls or ceilings with holes, falling plaster or peeling paint, or stains unremovable or unpaintable, etc.
	Cracked or missing window panes or plastic/cardboard in place of panes.
	Doors or windows that stick or do not open.
	Air leaks around windows or doors from cracks or other broken or missing parts.
	Roof sags, has missing shingles or materials or needs patching, or in any way allows water to drain into the dwelling.
	Cracked foundation.
	Other problems, please specify.

YES	NO	NO OPINION	
			104. Does the city need additional subsidized low-cost housing for lower income families or senior citizens?
			105. Should additional rental housing units be provided?

106. Please indicate if you believe the condition of housing in your neighborhood is above average, about average or below average for the city.
______ Above Average
______ About Average
______ Below Average

107. If low interest loans or grants were available to improve your dwelling unit, and you were eligible for these, would you apply for this assistance? (Check one)
______ No, I do not own my dwelling unit.
______ Yes, I would consider applying.
______ No, I would not apply.
______ No opinion.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES				
Please indicate how you rate the need to improve the following services.				
Very Important	Important	Not Important	No opinion	
				108. Utilities (electricity, gas)
				109. Telephone
				110. Trash Collection
				111. Water Quality (Taste, Clearness)
				112. Water Quantity (Pressure, Volume)
				113. Sewage Disposal
				114. Street and Road Conditions
Very Important	Important	Not Important	No opinion	
				115. Street and Road Maintenance
				116. Drainage, Curbs, and Gutters
				117. Sidewalks and Pedestrian Walkways
				118. Street Lighting
				119. Snow Removal From streets
				120. Public Library
				121. Police Protection
				122. Fire Protection
				123. Parking Facilities
				124. Disabled/Handicapped Access and Facilities
				125. Senior Citizen Center and Services
				126. Should the city concentrate similar types of activities (residential, commercial, industrial) in separate areas?
				127. Should the city sponsor a community beautification/cleanup

				campaign?
				128. Would you support seeking state or federal assistance to correct any deficiencies or to make improvements to any of the above public facilities and services? If so, which?

129. What do you consider the most important improvements in the community in the past five years?

EXHIBIT I

USING "20 CLUES TO RURAL COMMUNITY SURVIVAL" FOR A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT MEETING

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development is an independent, nonprofit organization which provides leadership training, field research, and guidance to support sustainable rural communities. Started in 1985, the Heartland Center is well known for the excellent training it offers on "Helping Small Towns Succeed" and "Skill Building for Stronger Communities." The "20 Clues to Rural Community Survival" grew out of case studies conducted by the Center in the mid-1980's of five Nebraska communities that had successfully survived the worst agricultural crisis since the Great Depression. The case studies led to the development of the "20 Clues" – a synthesis of characteristics that appeared to be common to successful rural communities and community development programs. The "Clues" are attributes that have helped rural communities achieve success despite the sometimes daunting odds they face. Thriving communities tend to possess a variety of these characteristics, but not usually all of them.

These ideas on using the "20 Clues to Rural Community Survival" are reprinted with the permission of the Heartland Center. For more information on the Heartland Center and its programs contact the Center at its mailing address: 941 O Street, Suite 920, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508, telephone: 402- 474-7667 or 1-800- 927-1115 or at its Internet Website: www.4w.com/heartland.

Some Ideas on Using 20 CLUES

Note: Many communities have used the list of "Clues to Rural Community Survival" as the basis for a town hall meeting or some type of community forum. The list has also been widely published in newspapers, newsletters and the like, and permission to do so is willingly granted as long as the Heartland Center is credited.

The "20 Clues" exercise might take an entire day or a series of meetings to cover effectively. As an alternative, we have included two other shorter Heartland Center monographs that may be useful for a single evening meeting. These are:

- Exhibit J: "6 Myths About the Future of Small Towns"
- Exhibit K: "7 Secrets to Coping with Change in Small Towns"

One excellent design for discussion groups organized around 20 Clues is to seat participants at tables in groups of no more than eight.

Step one:

Each table group is then assigned this task:

First as an individual, consider this list and select three items that you think our town excels at; and then three items that represent areas where our town needs work. After each person has selected her or his items, talk as a group and agree on the table groups' top three in each category.

Step Two:

Each table should report to the entire group. A master list of areas for future work can be created by a discussion leader or facilitator. While reporting, each table should be asked for one and only one item at a time, then the next tabletakes a turn at reporting only one item. In this way, duplication can be avoided and each table will have the chance to contribute rather than just confirming the previous report.

Step Three:

The list of items that need future work can be treated as a possible agenda for action. At this point, participants can "vote" using self adhesive dots or by making check marks on the items they consider most significant. This ranking process works best if participants are asked to pick their top three or five items. The votes or check marks can be tabulated and reported back to the group. Ranking in this way offers an active and visual method of participant involvement.

Step Four:

The ranked items can be used to create citizen task forces or action teams. Participants can self-select relative to the ranked items. Some variations on recruiting for these task forces or action teams might be to post a large sheet of paper for each of the top five items and ask individuals to sign up on the sheet if they'll come to another work session on that item. Passing around a tablet or clipboard can also be effective. Sometimes having one individual who will act as a temporary chair for a group will work well, especially if the group then gathers in one section of the room to talk about next steps. Any systematic action planning process can be used to organize involvement around the ranked items.

The meeting facilitators can hand out the complete list of Clues and ask participants to reflect on the list in general. (The annotated list of the Clues also can be used to offer a brief explanation of the list and sample action steps.) This activity offers participants a chance to think about the Clues and to discuss them in the context of their own community and its capacity to survive and improve.

20 CLUES TO RURAL COMMUNITY SURVIVAL

1. Evidence of Community Pride
2. Emphasis on Quality in Business and Community Life
3. Willingness to Invest in the Future
4. Participatory Approach to Community Decision Making
5. Cooperative Community Spirit
6. Realistic Appraisal of Future Opportunities
7. Awareness of Competitive Positioning
8. Knowledge of the Physical Environment
9. Active Economic Development Program
10. Deliberate Transition of Power to a Younger Generation of Leaders
11. Acceptance of Women in Leadership Roles
12. Strong Belief in and Support of Education
13. Problem-Solving Approach to Providing Health Care
14. Strong Multi-Generational Family Orientation
15. Strong Presence of Traditional Institutions that Are Integral to Community Life
16. Sound and Well-Maintained Infrastructure
17. Careful Use of Fiscal Resources
18. Sophisticated Use of Information Resources
19. Willingness to Seek Help from the Outside
20. Conviction that, in the Long Run, You Have to Do It Yourself 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival: An Annotated List

1. Evidence of Community Pride

Successful communities are often showplaces of community care and attention, with neatly trimmed yards, public gardens and well-kept public parks. But pride also shows up in other ways, especially in community festivals and events that give residents the chance to celebrate their community, its history and heritage.

What actions could your community take to encourage community pride?

Sample action items could include:

- Coordinate a community clean-up project.
- Organize an annual community festival.
- Promote a local yard or garden contest.
- Form a task force to deal with dilapidated, vacant buildings.
- Conduct community "cleanup," "paint-up," "fix-up" campaigns through cooperative action by volunteer civic groups and the local government.

2. Emphasis on Quality in Business and Community Life

People in successful communities believe that something worth doing is worth doing right. Facilities are built to last, and so are homes and other improvements. Newer brick additions to schools are common, for example, and businesses are built or expanded with attention to design and construction detail.

What actions could your community take to emphasize quality in business and community life?

Sample action items could include:

- Working with a high school class to do a "customer satisfaction survey" for the Chamber of Commerce.
- Do a community survey on the quality of city services.
- Encourage service clubs to discuss and outline the best qualities of the community.
- Adopt and actively enforce "community decay" ordinance for blight removal.
- Aggressively enforce the Uniform Code for the Abatement of Dangerous Buildings to eliminate dilapidated or deteriorated buildings, such as the clearance of a substantial portion of unsafe, vacant, deteriorated structures that cannot be economically rehabilitated.
- Adopt zoning to encourage compatible land uses in the community.

3. Willingness to Invest in the Future

Some of the brick and mortar investments are most apparent, but these communities also invest in their future in other ways. Residents invest time and energy in community improvement projects, and they concern themselves with how what they are doing today will impact on the lives of their children and grandchildren in the future.

What actions could your community take to determine your community's willingness to invest in the future and to encourage a greater willingness to invest?

Sample action items could include:

- Prepare a summary of past business expansions and start-ups.
- Track and document the total hours of donated volunteer hours as evidence of citizen investment in the community.
- Have high school students create a task force on the future of the community.
- Start a community foundation to support long-term community development.
- Prepare or update a capital improvements plan for community infrastructure.

4. Participatory Approach to Community Decision-Making

Authoritative models don't seem to exist in these communities, and power is deliberately shared. People still know who you need on your side to get something done, but even the most powerful of opinion leaders work through the systems -- formal as well as informal -- to build consensus for what they want to do.

What actions could your community take to encourage a more participatory approach to community decision-making?

Sample action items could include:

- Form or use a citizen's task force to develop policy recommendations for local elected officials.
- Create a town web page or monthly newsletter to publicize town news and issues.
- Schedule an annual New England-style town meeting to discuss and identify issues of concern to the community.
- Encourage local elected officials and other business and community leaders to schedule an informal monthly coffee "klatch" to be accessible to citizens.
- Make sure the local newspaper provides adequate coverage of town council meetings.

5. Cooperative Community Spirit

Successful rural communities devote more attention to cooperative activities than to fighting over what should be done and by whom. The stress is on working together toward a common goal and the focus is on positive results. They may spend a long time making a decision, and there may be disagreements along the way, but eventually, as one small town leader put it," stuff does get done."

What actions could your community take to encourage a more cooperative community spirit?

Sample action items could include:

- Have local service and business groups cooperate to organize an annual community festival.
- Encourage Main Street businesses to cooperate on setting evening shopping hours and sales events.
- Create a “Good News” column in the local newspaper to report on the efforts of civic organizations and share how people are working together.
- Have local service and business groups cooperate with the high school to organize an annual homecoming event and parade.

6. Realistic Appraisal of Future Opportunities

Many of the communities have already learned an important strategic lesson, namely building on your assets and minimizing your weaknesses. Few small communities believe that they are likely to land a giant industry. Many of them say they wouldn't want one if it came along, fearing too much dependence on one employer would be dangerous. The successful communities know that a more realistic approach considers the community and the region as the context for future opportunities.

What actions could your community take to encourage a more realistic appraisal of future opportunities?

Sample action items could include:

- Inviting authorities from the state’s universities or governmental agencies to discuss economic and demographic trends.
- Create an up to date profile of your community's situation as a “reality check.”
- Invite outside speakers from business, industry, or economic development organizations or agencies to discover what businesses consider in relocating or expanding.

7. Awareness of Competitive Positioning

The thriving communities know who the competition is and so do the businesses in towns. Everyone tries to stress local loyalty as a way to help, but many businesses also keep tabs on their competitors in other towns -- they don't want any of the hometown folks to have an excuse to go elsewhere. This is an area in which the recognition of community assets -- people, associations and institutions -- is vitally important. The comparison of one town to another is a significant means to spur improvements.

What actions could your community take to encourage a greater awareness of your community’s competitive position?

Sample action items could include:

- Survey local residents on their shopping needs and whether the community is providing them. Research in-town and out-of-town prices and calculate the cost of travel and time to shop elsewhere.
- Try to identify your community's competitive edge or "niche" and consider how they might be improved.
- Support local or regional efforts to create "micro-business" loan programs to encourage local small business reinvestment and expansion.

8. Knowledge of the Physical Environment

Importance of location is underscored continuously in local decision-making, as business and civic leaders picture their community in relation to others. Beyond location, however, communities must also be familiar with what they have locally. For example, the issue of preservation and protection of natural resources must be balanced with development options. Communities that manage this balance have a long-term approach to both environmental preservation and economic development.

What actions could your community take to increase local knowledge of the physical environment?

Sample action items could include:

- Work with the local planning board and soil conservation district to learn about current community planning and development and resource conservation issues.
- Review the community's comprehensive plan or growth policy to identify physical constraints for community development such as floodplains, transportation infrastructure, water quality, etc.
- Organize a public forum on local environmental or community planning issues.

9. Active Economic Development Program

An organized and active approach to economic development is common in successful communities. This type of approach depends on public and private sector resources working hand in hand. Private economic development corporations are common, either as a subcommittee or an outgrowth of a Chamber of Commerce or commercial club. However, it's clear that the most successful towns emphasize retaining and expanding existing businesses as well as trying to develop new businesses. This is a "gardening, not hunting" model of economic development.

What actions could your community take to create an active economic development program?

Sample action items could include:

- Develop an on-going relationship with federal, state or regional economic development programs.
- Encourage internships or "School to Work" programs for high school students with local businesses.

- Create a business directory for your community.
- Support the activities of the local Chamber of Commerce or form one if one does not exist.

10. Deliberate Transition of Power to a Younger Generation of Leaders

Young leadership is more the rule than the exception in thriving rural communities. In many cases, these young people grew up in town and decided to stay or returned later to raise a family. In just as many situations, they are people who've decided to make a life in the community even though they grew up elsewhere. However, it's typical in a successful community to have a formal or informal means for established leaders to bring new recruits into public service.

What actions could your community take to encourage a deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders?

Sample action items could include:

- Place younger people on local business or service organization boards of directors.
- Encourage younger community leaders to participate in leadership training opportunities.
- Encourage "term limits" for leadership positions to encourage recruitment of younger people into leadership roles.

11. Acceptance of Women in Leadership Roles

Women hold positions of leadership in these rural communities and those roles extend beyond the traditional strongholds of teacher, nurse or librarian. In successful communities, women take on roles as mayors, law enforcement officers, non-profit managers, business owners, etc. In many communities, this inclusion is expanded to minorities, newcomers and all types of non-traditional leaders.

What actions could your community take to encourage the acceptance of women in leadership roles?

Sample action items could include:

- Place women on local business or service organization boards of directors.
- Encourage women to participate in leadership training opportunities.
- Encourage recruitment of women into leadership roles.

12. Strong Belief in and Support of Education

Good schools are a point of pride as well as a stable employment force, and rural community leaders are very much aware of their school's importance. However, this characteristic goes beyond the K-12 system to include an approach to life-long learning that puts education at the center of many community activities. Whether adult education

is targeted at skills and job performance or hobbies and recreation, the successful community makes the most of education at all levels.

What actions could your community take to foster a strong belief in and support of education?

Sample action items could include:

- Support the efforts of the local parent-teacher association.
- Support the development of cooperative extension outreach programs in the community.
- Support the development of continuing education programs in the community through the local high school, vocational schools, or the university system.
- Encourage annual school open houses and multiple use of school facilities for non-school community organizations or functions.

13. Problem-Solving Approach to Providing Health Care

Local health care is a common concern in rural communities, but strategies for delivery vary, depending on community needs. While one community may decide that keeping a doctor in residence should be the priority, another may choose to train as many people as possible as EMT's or to use telecommunications to augment a clinic. The point here is the variety of solutions to a common problem.

What actions could your community take to encourage a problem-solving approach to providing health care?

Sample action items could include:

- Encourage more people to volunteer for training as "emergency medical technicians" (EMT's).
- Provide office space for health practitioners.
- Investigate opportunities for "tele-medicine" using satellite and computer technology tied to regional medical facilities.
- Research government programs which support recruitment of doctors or nurse practitioners to under-served rural communities.

14. Strong Multi-Generational Family Orientation

These are family-oriented communities, with activities often built around family needs and ties. But the definition of family is broad, and it includes younger as well as older generations and people new to the community. A typical example of this attitude is the provision of child care for community town hall meetings, thus allowing young families to attend.

What actions could your community take to encourage a strong multi-generational family orientation?

Sample action items could include:

- Promote the interaction of senior citizens and pre-school children through tutoring programs or construction of shared facilities for senior citizens and programs such as Head Start.
- Provide senior discounts to encourage the participation of older citizens in school events such as sports or plays.

15. Strong Presence of Traditional Institutions that Are Integral to Community Life

Churches are often the strongest force in this characteristic, but other types of community institutions such as newspapers and radio stations, hospitals and schools fill this role also. Service clubs retain a strong influence in social activities as well as in community improvement efforts.

What actions could your community take to support the strong presence of traditional institutions that are integral to community life?

Sample action items could include:

- Support or start a ministerial association and encourage their involvement with human service programs.
- Encourage news media coverage of and involvement in organized community improvement efforts.
- Help organizations or programs identify new clients by sponsoring local events or displays. For example, promote a local housing rehabilitation project by photo displays and providing brochures at the local library or social service agency offices.

16. Sound and Well-Maintained Infrastructure

Thriving rural communities understand the importance of physical infrastructures -- such as streets, sidewalks, water systems, sewage treatment plants-- and efforts are made to maintain and improve them. In these communities, a clean-up day includes public parks and playgrounds, business owners keep sidewalks repaired, and volunteer labor and donated materials go a long way to maintaining public buildings.

What actions could your community take to assure that it has sound and well-maintained infrastructure?

Sample action items could include:

- Adopt a long-range, financial capital improvements plan (CIP) and update it each year.
- Adopt a capital budget, which is updated annually in conjunction with the CIP.
- Support adequate operation and maintenance budgets, including reserves for repair and replacement of community infrastructure.
- Implement recommended best management practices for operation and maintenance of public facilities.
- Adopt and implement a wellhead protection plan for a groundwater sources of drinking water.

17. Careful Use of Fiscal Resources

Frugality is a way of life in successful small communities, and expenditures are made carefully. People aren't afraid to spend money, when they believe they should, and then, typically, things are built to last. But neither are they spendthrifts. Expenditures are often seen as investments in the future of the community.

What actions could your community take to assure that it makes efficient use of fiscal resources?

Sample action items could include:

- Adopt a capital budget, which is updated annually in conjunction with an adopted capital improvements plan.
- Support adequate operation and maintenance budgets, including reserves for repair and replacement of community infrastructure.
- Seek out, analyze, and secure the firm commitment of alternative or additional funds from all appropriate local, state, and federal public or private sources potentially available to assist in financing community facilities.
- Raise taxes, user charges or fee schedules to the extent necessary to assure adequate operation and maintenance of community facilities and reserves for repair and replacement.
- Institute water metering to encourage conservation and a more equitable assignment of user costs.
- Establish a community foundation.
- Utilize cooperative purchasing opportunities or federal or state surplus property programs.
- Invest in current computer technology and software to improve financial management.

18. Sophisticated Use of Information Resources

Rural community leaders are knowledgeable about their communities beyond the knowledge base available in the community. In one town, for example, retail sales histories from a state university were studied for trend information. In another, census data was used to study population change. In many communities, computer links to the world wide web have made all types of information, available.

What actions could your community take to assure that it makes sophisticated use of information resources?

Sample action items could include:

- Research all sources of information including past plans, studies, reports, etc. at local state, and federal level.
- Use the Internet to cost-effectively search and access existing available data on the community.
- Make sure state agencies have current data on the community.

19. Willingness to Seek Help from the Outside

There's little reluctance to seek help from outside resources. These communities understand the system of accessing resources, ranging from grants for infrastructure improvement to expertise about human service programs. Competing for such resources successfully is a source of pride for local leaders.

What actions could your community take to demonstrate its willingness to seek help from the outside?

Sample action items could include:

- Investigate federal and state or private foundation sources of matching grants or low interest loans to improve community facilities and services.
- Actively participate in state municipal or county government associations.
- Seek out, analyze, and secure the firm commitment of alternative or additional funds from all appropriate local, state, and federal public or .private sources potentially available to assist in financing community and economic development projects.
- Seek assistance from state university architectural school in designing a Main Street redevelopment project.

20. Conviction that, in the Long Run, You Have to Do It Yourself

Although outside help is sought when appropriate, it is nevertheless true that thriving small towns believe that their destiny is in their own hands. They are not waiting for some outsider to save them, nor do they believe that they can sit and wait for things to get better. Making a hometown a good place to live for a long time to come is a pro-active assignment, and these local leaders know that no one will take care of atown as well as the people who live there.

What actions could your community take to demonstrate the conviction that, in the long run, you have to do it yourself?

Sample action items could include:

- Efforts to resolve community problems with local resources by raising taxes, user charges or fee schedules to the maximum reasonable extent, considering local financial constraints.
- Resolve community problems through local non-financial community efforts, such implementing recommended best management practices for operation and maintenance of community facilities.
- Provide adequate on going, long-term support of adequate operation and maintenance budgets, including reserves for repair and replacement.
- Undertake efforts in the community to address housing and community revitalization needs, such as improving public facilities, establishing and promoting the use of tax incentives for building remodeling, or coordinating with private housing efforts, such as Habitat for Humanity.

- Conduct annual community "cleanup," "paint-up," "fix-up" campaigns through cooperation of volunteer civic groups and local government.

Exhibit J

6 Myths About the Future of Small Towns

by Milan Wall and Vicki Luther, Ed.D.
Heartland Center for Leadership Development

These myths represent common misunderstandings that are part of today's debate about rural community survival. What gets ignored in the debate are those examples of thriving small communities where leaders ignore dire predictions and push ahead to make a difference, even when times are tough. The mythology surrounding small towns often works against the most productive approaches to rural community development. Approaches that work emphasize locally based ideas and self-reliance, focusing on what can happen when people of vision work together to get things done.

MYTH 1 Towns that are 'Too Small' have No Future
Mythology about small towns says that there is a certain population number that can support a community and no less. That number may be 2500 or 1000 or 500, depending on whose "expertise" is being quoted. The truth is that there is no magical number at which a town can survive. Research has shown that even very tiny towns, with populations as small as 100 and less, manage to survive through thoughtful planning, entrepreneurial genius and hard work. No community should perceive itself as "too small" to survive. In fact, small towns can use size as a competitive advantage. As with a small business, the smaller community can retain a certain flexibility. Without the disadvantages of city bureaucracy, it can respond faster to new trends and changing marketplace opportunities. Like a small business, it can seek its own unique niche.

MYTH 2 A Community's Location is Key to its Survival
Dependence on proximity to a major highway, a large metropolitan area or a significant natural resource is typical of industrial-age thinking that believes a community's success hinges on location. This type of thinking may have been more important in the past, when industry and agriculture employed most rural job holders. Today, however, with growth in the service, information, and government sectors, the old industrial age factors have lesser importance. Now, the key is "what community leaders do with what is available." This translates as attitudes and behaviors of people in leadership. In other words, in an "Information Age," leadership, not location, is the most important factor in community survival.

MYTH 3 Best Strategy for Economic Development
Recruiting new industries is still the strategy of choice among many small towns and economic development experts, even though study after study suggests that industrial recruitment, alone, is not a realistic long-term answer. Too often, small towns have wasted all their time, energy and money trying to attract new industry, only to learn that they should have been working harder to keep the employers they already have. Small towns that throw all their eggs into the business recruitment basket are taking a big risk. They're competing for a few expansions or relocations against thousands of other small towns just like themselves nationwide. They should be working on a broader strategy that emphasizes growing from within, first, and, then recruiting from the outside.

MYTH 4 Small Towns Can't Compete in the Global Economy .
Too many people seem convinced that small towns can't compete in a global economy. Yet small towns throughout America are home to an amazing variety of highly sophisticated, entrepreneurial successes. Many rural communities have small manufacturers that are producing high quality products for a unique marketing niche, which extends beyond the local area to a regional, national or even international market. With access to toll free incoming telephone lines, cross-country package shippers, and the Internet, businesses can compete in the global marketplace. Because they are located in a smaller and often less complex local business environment, they may be able to compete by moving quickly to take advantage of fast-moving marketplace opportunities.

MYTH 5 The "Best People" Leave Small Towns as Soon as They Can
The continuing decline of population in most rural areas remains a problem. But this fact is often described in inaccurate and unproductive ways. Too often, even rural people use the term "brain drain" as if it meant that anyone with brains would get out. They act as if the "best and brightest" should leave to seek better opportunities in the cities or to get a higher education, never to return. It is true that many people find opportunities elsewhere, but it's also true that many capable people stay in small towns or return to them. As small town leaders, they make priceless contributions to local quality of life, giving time and attention to civic affairs, service clubs, school events and family matters. State and local leaders should stop acting as if the "brain drain" means that no talent is left.

MYTH 6 The Rural and Urban Economies are Not Interdependent
Another myth about rural communities says that larger metropolitan areas are more important than smaller communities in our nation's economy. It's not really news that rural industries such as agriculture, mining or land management are playing a smaller role in the rural-urban economic mix. This doesn't mean, however, that cities and counties could maintain their quality of life with out farm products, coal, oil and the natural resources available to the city and country person alike. Many city residents are nostalgic or sentimental about small towns, but they often forget that our essential raw materials need dynamic rural infrastructures to get from rural to urban markets.
Understanding myths like these is key to stopping their negative influence on community survival. Focusing on the positive aspects of small towns and maintaining a creative outlook on all development strategies will insure community vitality for years to come. Total community involvement and a strong sense of pride can put an end to the myths and pave the way for successful rural community living.

Exhibit K

7 Secrets to Coping With Change in Small Towns

by Milan Wall and Vicki Luther, Ed.D.
Heartland Center for Leadership Development

About the Seven Secrets

These "Seven Secrets" are drawn from the experience of several years of immersion into the challenges facing small towns and rural communities, as they struggle to overcome the uncertainties caused by a fickle world economy and the continuing depopulation of America's countryside. Obviously, these are not "secrets" in the sense that no one else knows about them. But they do represent an important perspective that gets relatively little attention, despite overwhelming evidence that small towns with the right leadership can survive... even in times like these.

SECRET 1 Positive Attitude
Conventional wisdom says that a small town has to be located within a few miles of a major highway or close to significant natural resources or a large city, or be larger than a certain size, or have some other "characteristic of circumstance" to provide any hope for survival. Now, however, conventional wisdom is being replaced by a far more useful, up- to-date perspective. Research demonstrates that leadership is more important than location, that community attitude is more important than community size. In thriving small towns leaders are ready and willing to take on the challenges associated with community development.

SECRET 2 Entrepreneurial Spirit
Communities that are good at surviving are successful entrepreneurs, in much the same way that surviving businesses are entrepreneurs. In healthy small towns, leaders are willing and creative risk takers, learning from their failures as well as their successes. Public and private sectors work together for the community's future, using new and innovative public private partnerships that build on entrepreneurial strengths and create entrepreneurial successes. In these communities, support for maintaining current businesses and developing new ones is evident, and no one believes that simply recruiting industry is the hope for the future.

SECRET 3 Bias for Action
Communities that are coping successfully with change are communities with a bias for action, where citizens don't just talk about doing something new or trying something different. They are communities of problem-solvers, where creative energy is evident in ongoing community programs and new community projects. Here, leadership assumes the chief responsibility for the community's future viability. In these communities, leaders are clever enough to pick new projects that have a realistic chance for success, have a significant enough impact to be felt if they succeed, and that will not devastate the community if they don't work. In viable communities, people are not waiting for someone else to tell them what to do, and they don't blame others for their own inaction.

SECRET 4 Focus on Controllables

Communities that are surviving in challenging times are communities that are smart enough to focus on what they can control, rather than worrying about all the forces outside of their control. They don't waste time fretting about all the problems that they can't do anything about or talking only about the forces they really can't influence. In these communities, leaders are good not only at exploiting community strengths, they are also realistic about community weaknesses. They are willing to take steps to minimize the negative impacts of those weaknesses on their future survival.

SECRET 5 Plan for Development

Surviving communities are not just "drifting toward an uncertain future;" but rather they are taking deliberate steps to plan for the development of their towns, schools, and businesses. In these communities, leaders understand the importance of engaging in planning as a community, with lots of participation in the development of specific blueprints for action, specifying who does what, when, and what is expected to happen as a result. Development plans must also be flexible enough to respond to changing conditions. Leaders need to have a strategy in place that enables them to respond quickly to new opportunities.

SECRET 6 Strategic Outlook

Towns that are coping with change are towns with an obvious strategic outlook on their situation and what they can do about it. They are insightful enough to find opportunities where others may only see threats, and they are clever enough to match those opportunities with their own strengths. Leaders in healthy communities believe that their towns can take charge of their futures through a realistic, yet hopeful perspective... one in which they think of their towns in much the way a business owner thinks of marketing a product or service. A community needs to become aware of its own competitive situation, and it needs to learn to take steps that put its competitive advantages forward.

SECRET 7 Vision for the Future

A community that tackles change head on and wins is a community that has a vision for the future. It has leaders who are good at helping the community articulate what residents want the community to be like in 5,10 or even 25 years. As a community, the town coping with change is able to find sufficient consensus to not only articulate the vision, but also to make it understandable, so that everyone has a chance to support it. Communities coping with change find ways to take what is unique about them and then translate that uniqueness into a vision that encourages and motivates citizens to work harder on their community's behalf.

CONCLUSION

The attitudes and behaviors of leaders are key factors that will help communities cope with change in these times. No longer will a town survive simply because it is located next to the major highway or close to the larger city, nor will these "industrial age" assumptions save the community whose leadership is not ready to take charge. What has been learned about community leadership implies a strong message of hope for small towns, since community attitude is still easier to change than community location! The message for today's leaders is this: "You can't move your town to a different location; you can move your town's attitude in a different direction."

EXHIBIT L

RESOURCES FOR PREPARING A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT OR PLAN

I. RESOURCES FOR EVALUATING LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS OR DEVELOPING A HOUSING AND COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION PROJECT

A. Statewide Housing Condition Study

A potentially very useful resource regarding local housing conditions is the statewide *Housing Condition Study,* available from the MDOC Housing Division (444-0092). This study provides an excellent and readily available source of information based on county appraiser property tax information about all dwellings throughout the State. The information presented in the study is also available by county and selected municipalities (at least one within each county). Using this information concerning counties and municipalities will enable communities and organizations to better understand and identify what types of housing structures are available for rental and purchase. The information can also be used to identify the housing stock which may need rehabilitation.

B. *Housing Rehabilitation Program Workbook* and *Designing and Initiating a Small Community Housing Rehabilitation Program*

The Montana CDBG Program has two publications available to assist local governments: *Housing Rehabilitation Program Workbook* and *Designing and Initiating a Small Community Housing Program*. The CDBG Program also has available booklets on housing rehabilitation entitled *Housing Rehabilitation for Small Cities - Second Edition* prepared by the Council of State Community Development Agencies and *How to Design a Rental Rehabilitation Program* prepared by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

II. RESOURCES FOR EVALUATING LOCAL PUBLIC FACILITIES NEEDS OR DEVELOPING A PUBLIC FACILITIES PROJECT

MDOC has published technical guides that may be useful to local officials who are working on public facility problems, including:

- ***A Handbook: Capital Facilities Scheduling and Financing***
- ***Planning and Financing Community Water and Sewer Systems in Montana***
- ***The Mini Capital Improvements Plan for Small Towns***

III. SOURCES FOR ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

A. Economic and Demographic Databook

The MDOC Housing Division also maintains an Economic and Demographic Databook of historic and forecasted information by county -- including employment data, earned and unearned income, earnings by industry, and population by age cohorts both male and female. The material is presented in large tables and is helpful when making decisions regarding future housing projects within communities.

B. MDOC's Census and Economic Information Center

Another important source for housing-related data is MDOC's Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC, 4406/444-2896), the official source of U.S. Census data for Montana. CEIC is located within MDOC's Economic Development Division and assists individuals, businesses, governments, communities and economic development efforts by providing Montana demographic and economic information and statistics, as well as technical expertise. CEIC is the designated state agency to provide user access to electronic data from the Census Bureau and to receive, reproduce, and distribute maps produced by the Bureau. CEIC maintains a collection of documents and electronic files that address the economy and population of the state (historical as well as current), including special papers and statistical reports from federal agencies and other Montana state agencies. CEIC is also coordinating Census 2000 programs in Montana with the Census Bureau. CEIC also compiles and updates the Montana County Statistical Reports, which are a collection of demographic and socioeconomic data for the state of Montana and its 56 counties. and for the state. The Census and Economic Information Center's web site (**http://commerce.state.mt.us/ceic**) allows clients to research and gather data in an easily accessible manner

IV. SOURCES FOR MAPS AND OTHER DATA

A. U.S. Census Maps

Maps identifying the census districts within each county may be ordered from the Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC), Montana Department of Commerce, 1424 9th Ave., Helena, Montana 59620, (Telephone 444-2896). Microfiche copies of the county census district maps are available free; paper copies of the maps may be purchased. As noted above, a wide variety of CEIC data can be accessed via the CEIC web page located at:

http://commerce.state.mt.us/ceic/index.htm

B. County Maps and Urban Plat Maps

Maps of Montana's counties, cities and towns can also be ordered from the Road Inventory and Mapping Section, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), 2701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, Montana 59620 (Telephone 444-6119) . A wide variety

of base maps for counties, cities, and towns as well as some unincorporated communities can be at this address or accessed via the MDT web page located at:

http://www.mdt.mt.us./planning/public.htm

C. Flood Plain Maps and Water Resource Information

Maps of designated flood plains may be ordered from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Water Operations Bureau, 48 North Last Chance Gulch, Helena, Montana 59620 (Telephone 444-0860). A wide variety of water resource-related information, including the DNRC Guide to Stream Permitting in Montana, can also be accessed via the DNRC web page located at:

http://www.dnrc.mt.us./wrd/home.htm

D. Topographic Maps and Other Natural Resource Information

Maps depicting a variety of natural resource related information, as well as a wealth of other natural resource information, can be ordered from the Montana State Library, Natural Resources Information System (NRIS), 1515 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620 (Telephone 444-2987). NRIS programs include:

~ The Natural Heritiage Program which maintains a computer-assisted inventory of Montana's biological resources, including rare and endangered plant and animal species.
~ the Water Information System is the starting point for locating water resources data on surface water, groundwater, water quality, riparian areas, floodplains, wetlands, and more.
~ The Geographic Information System (GIS) provides maps, map data, and technical assistance with computerized mapping.

The NRIS data can be accessed via the NRIS web page:

http://nris.state.mt.us/index.htm

A related web site is the Montana Rivers Information System which can also be accessed via the NRIS web page.

500 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of $1.95 per copy, for a total cost of $975.00, which includes $975.00 for printing and $.00 for distribution.